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Influences on relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants in British Government: a study based on the perceptions of former Ministers

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by David Stokes

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The core of this work is based on interviews with twenty-five former government ministers. A full list is available in Appendix II. I was struck by their honesty, their straight-forward approach, and how self-effacing many of them were about their time in office. That is an encouraging set of qualities to identify in a class of people whose motivation is often maligned. I would like to thank each of them for freely giving me their time. I want to single out Dominic Goggins for his positive engagement at a very difficult time for him and his family. Thank you Dominic.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants in British Government. It is argued that the deliberative space for officials to devise and critique policy in tandem with Ministers is contracting. The change occurred after Margaret Thatcher incentivised officials to behave in certain ways, and her embrace of New Public Management made relationships within government more transactional. Given this scenario the thesis explores how relationships between Ministers and officials can be improved. To determine this twenty-five former UK Government Ministers were interviewed complementing an earlier study which examined the issue from the perspective of senior officials. These Ministers reported that successful relationships were most likely to be established when Civil Servants demonstrated effective leadership, commitment to implementing policy, honesty, technical skill, and awareness of political and external realities. In addition it is thought that time invested early in the relationship helps to communicate Ministers' expectations. Ministers also reported what they feel to be behaviours which undermine the relationship: misunderstanding the professional role of officials, relying upon special advisors rather than direct contact with officials, a lack of managerial experience, and public criticism of officials. Ministers also identified Civil Servants' behaviours likely to result in poor relationships - appearing averse to change, being unable to rationalise the advantages of existing approaches, and a reluctance to lead or assume responsibility. Some of the perceptions identified in the literature, such as Civil Servants seeking control and lacking competence, were not afforded the same prominence by Ministerial interviewees. They highlighted systemic issues including the feudal and hierarchical nature of Whitehall, and their perception that the wrong skills and behaviours are incentivised. They also noted the lack of training for Ministers and their inability to pass on their experiences to colleagues. In addition to these observations about personal relations respondents expressed a deeper concern about the changing roles and expectations between Ministers and officials. Despite the evident contradiction between contemporary practice and the constitutional position created by Haldane in 1918, Ministers still appear to accept the latter as the basis for their relationships with officials. Further research may be required to explore this, alongside the disparity identified between the ministerial view from the literature and my interviewees, and the training lacuna. The thesis concludes by making a number of recommendations concerning future practice.

SUMMARY OF PORTFOLIO

The connection between this thesis and other elements of my doctoral study is set out in this summary of portfolio. This thesis constitutes my "major" doctoral project. It follows from my "minor" doctoral project which involved a piece of qualitative research, based on personal interviews with five former Civil Servants, including Robin Butler. I ascertained views about relationships with Ministers from the Civil Servants' standpoint. In this way I was able to examine the reverse perspective to the one focused on in my major project. Although the sample size for the minor project was small, the views expressed often appear to corroborate those of the former Ministers interviewed for the major project.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Ministers and their Civil Servants is important to the lives of ordinary citizens across the UK. The exact nature of the relationship is largely concealed given the roles the participants play. However, since the publication of Richard Crossman's diaries in the mid-1970s, a succession of diaries, memoirs and other public commentaries - mainly from politicians - have been published. Often these present the relationship as problematic. In recent times the relationship appears to have become even more strained than in the past. As Lord Hennessy puts it:

> "…the governing marriage, as one might call it, is in trouble…The marriage, to an outside observer like myself, at the moment seems to be in more trouble than usual. The relationships are particularly scratchy." (Public Administration Select Committee, 2013, Q2)

In recent years, problems in the relationship have often been exposed publicly. Alleged briefing against certain Civil Servants from Government sources and the extensive front page coverage that The Times (2013) devoted to the subject are examples. However, finding material which offers helpful insights into the nature of the difficulties that appear to exist is relatively difficult. The problem with the accounts of politicians is that they are, by nature, one sided and may be self-serving. Academic research provides some valuable insights from the external perspective, but does not generally focus on relationships.

Civil Service input is rare given the nature of the role. I am a Government official. My research is neither intended to further my personal reputation or provide a 'glimpse into a hidden world' through an ethnographic study based on my own observations. My experiences are emphatically *not* the subject of this paper. That would be inappropriate. However, I start from a privileged position, given my intrinsic understanding of the context. My role is arguably both a critical strength and weakness of this thesis. This is explored further in Chapter 3 (Research Methodology) and in my conclusion. My intention is to develop better insights with the aim of optimising relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants. I am also motivated by a desire for my work to have utility and practical application. I hope that this work - in some form - will be a resource that both aspiring Ministers and Civil Servants can draw from.

The use of the terms 'Civil Servants', and 'Civil Service' throughout this work needs some qualification. I am concerned with the elements of Whitehall that regularly deal with Ministers. My focus is on central government departments, and the Civil Servants within them who interact with Ministers, whether in person, or through the nature of their work (e.g. providing written advice). This will include Senior Civil Servants, and many other more junior officials who work in Whitehall. References in the work to the Civil Service or Civil Servants should be seen in this light, unless otherwise specified in the text.

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In Chapter One, I consider the systemic pressures on the relationship, and the pressure on the Westminster model and the Haldane convention. My contention is that the role of the Civil Servant has changed in recent years; primarily as a result of a radical reimagining under Thatcher who embraced New Public Management (NPM). The deliberative space for Ministers and Civil Servants to craft and critique policy together, a hallmark of the relationship from the 1918 Haldane report, has contracted. The constitutional position no longer reflects the reality. This dissonance has increased tensions on individual relationships. Other interlinked pressures include demands for greater accountability, the increase in special advisors, changing societal expectations and the impact of ceaseless reform programmes. Despite this, I argue that a radical constitutional recalibration of the relationship between the Civil Service and Ministers is unlikely. I do not think there is the political appetite for this to happen. For this reason my research focuses on the optimisation of individual relationships, within a paradigm which is, admittedly, under extreme strain.

In Chapter Two, I present the results of my literature review, in light of my findings above. I have analysed three broad sources for insights into relationships. The first is Ministerial memoirs and diaries; the second is material produced by Civil Servants; and the third is academic publications (including those dealing with NPM). The Ministerial literature is the richest source. From this I draw out insights which fall into the categories of "competency" and "control" when it comes to concerns about Civil Servants. However, this literature does not offer a balanced view. Civil Service and academic literature provides useful insights – particularly when it comes to the changing nature of the relationships within government. Despite this, practical material dealing with individual relationships is limited. As a result I conclude that there are some deficiencies in the existing literature - as it does not generally deal with individual Ministerial-Civil Servant relationships in great depth.

In Chapter Three, I set out my research methodology. I start by explicitly clarifying my professional role as an active Civil Servant and 'insider researcher'. I explore and reflect on the potential affect on my research. I then explain my overarching methodology – and why I have used the constitutional approach as the frame for my work (whilst acknowledging the other potential methodological approaches to analysing British government). I then set out my primary research methods. I explain my rationale for conducting personal, extended, qualitative interviews – and how I selected who to approach. I also deal with ethical considerations and the presentation of my findings.

In Chapter Four, I present the first set of thematic findings from my primary research. I consider potential traits and behaviours that my interviewees thought might influence relationships with Civil Servants, both positively and negatively, from the Ministerial perspective. I conclude by summarising the behaviours that my interviewees thought Ministers should display and avoid. I also consider the potential connection with the arguments I advance in Chapter One concerning the challenges to the Westminster model.

In Chapter Five, I consider potential traits and behaviours that my interviewees thought might influence relationships with Ministers, both positively and negatively, from the Civil Service perspective. I conclude by summarising the behaviours that my interviewees thought Civil Servants should display and avoid. I consider the connections between the views of my interviewees and the erosion of Haldane as examined in Chapter One. I consider whether the "competence" and "control" themes identified in Chapter Two are consistent with my interviewees' perceptions. I conclude that there is a disparity.

In Chapter Six, I consider this disparity. I asked my interviewees for their views about the established narrative the literature presents, and why it exists (apparently in contrast with many of their views). I also give my own views about the potential reason for the disparity, what its methodological basis might be, and what can be drawn from it.

In Chapter Seven, I consider institutional issues with the Civil Service – many of which the Ministers I spoke to felt underpinned problems with individual relationships, negatively influencing them. Despite my focus on individual, human relationships, the affect of systemic issues also needs to be recognised. Preparation, training and induction are systemic issues that I contend can and should be addressed.

My conclusion includes reflection on my own role and practice. Haldane is endorsed by my interviewees, but in reality appears in decline. My key findings are summarised, along with recommendations for future areas of research and practice.

It is also important to note that my Ministerial interviewees have given specific consent to be cited by name, and have cleared the quotations that appear in this thesis. Whilst citing interviewees by name is somewhat unusual in this context, I am confident that the work benefits from this: the names of the Ministers I spoke to add credibility and power to the themes that collectively emerge from their words. In my judgement, their enthusiasm for this project and their agreement to be openly cited makes the work more compelling. That is particularly important given the practical aims of my research.

CHAPTER ONE – THE WESTMINSTER MODEL AND HALDANE: OLD STRUCTURES AND NEW REALITIES

In this Chapter, I consider the framing context in which individual relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants exist. My contention is that the Westminster model and the Haldane convention have been put under increasing strain in recent years. I explore some of the factors that have contributed to this rising systemic pressure. In particular, I suggest that the approach of Margaret Thatcher and the influence of New Public Management (NPM) are critical. Additional factors which have added to the strain include demands for greater accountability, the rise of special advisors, and increasing societal expectations. The realities for Ministers and Senior Civil Servants have changed as a result, but the formal constitutional underpinning to their relationship has not. Arguably, this dissonance has led to individual relationships between Ministers and officials becoming more difficult. In addition, waves of civil service reform have never fully addressed the fundamental nature of the relationship between Ministers and officials. No government in recent years has shown any appetite to address it. This historical reluctance has led me to focus, in the rest of this thesis, on individual relationships *within* the existing framework. As I conclude at the end of this Chapter, my aim is to generate material that might help Ministers and officials optimise their individual relationships, despite their existence within a creaking paradigm.

The Westminster Model

The Westminster model is the overarching historical frame for relationships between Ministers and officials in the UK. Officials are accountable to Ministers, who are in turn accountable to the electorate – but as representatives rather than delegates. They rule indivisibly, as an elite body, with the best interests of the nation at heart (Richards and Smith, 2016). The Westminster model is one example of the gradual evolution of convention, tradition and informal rules in the UK system – potentially as a consequence of the lack of a codified written constitution. Dowding (1995, p.162), considers that because our constitution is not codified, in effect we have no constitution at all. Britain is unusual in having no such written constitution, and is one of only three modern democracies that does not – the others being New Zealand and Israel (Bogdanor, 2009, p.9). In this context, the importance of the 'Westminster Model' or 'Westminster System' is clear.

A cornerstone of the Westminster model is the Northcote Trevelyan report of 1854 (Hennessy, 1990, Pp 31-55; Grant & Jary, 2010, P. 92). One of the most important principles it established was political neutrality:

> "...the Government of the country could not be carried on without the aid of an efficient body of permanent officers, occupying a position duly subordinate to that of the Ministers who are directly responsible to the Crown and to Parliament, yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability, and experience to be able to advise, assist, and, to some extent, influence, those who are from time to time set over them." (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854, p. 3)

The influence of Northcote Trevelyan is clear when the current Civil Service Code is considered. It sets out the four key values of the modern Civil Service as integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. (Cabinet Office (1), 2015).

Haldane and its legacy

The Haldane Committee report of 1918 was commissioned to improve the functioning of government and reappraise its structures. Haldane recommended departments were formed on the basis of service provided (e.g. Health and Education), rather than class of person (e.g. paupers or unemployed) (Ministry of Reconstruction, 1918, Pp 7-10), and that each was the responsibility of a minister. Critically Haldane stated that:

> "...adequate provision has not been made in the past for the organised acquisition of facts and information, and for the systematic application *of thought as preliminary to the settlement of policy* and its subsequent administration." (ibid, p.6 – emphasis added).

Alongside this, Haldane confirmed and strengthened the position concerning ministerial responsibility, which I examine below. Haldane dismissed alternatives as "...less effective in securing responsibility for official action and advice than the system followed in Departments where full responsibility is definitely laid upon the Minister..." (ibid, p.11). Collectively these last two findings are often labelled the Haldane convention. In other words, Ministers and Civil Servants exist in a symbiotic relationship, inseparable constitutionally, with a space embedded to design and critique policy before it is unveiled

(Richards and Smith, 2016, Pp.6 - 7; Public Administration Select Committee, 2013, p. 8). This constitutional fusing of elected governments and their administrative servants is recognised in law. The *Carltona*[1] doctrine allows officials to exercise powers given to Ministers in statute without any further delegation. Even more importantly, symbiosis also underpins the Whitehall convention of ministerial responsibility. The traditional deal that flows from Haldane is that Civil Servants pledge their loyalty to Ministers; and Ministers take the blame publicly when things go wrong[2].

Considine (2005, p.47) suggests that Ministerial responsibility is a major constitutional convention, even though his view is that Ministers are less likely to resign than they used to be if their Civil Servants are the ones at fault. Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe, Home Secretary in 1954, articulated the convention of Ministerial responsibility as follows:

> "The Minister is not bound to defend action of which he did not know, or of which he disapproves. But...he remains constitutionally responsible to Parliament for the fact that something has gone wrong, and he alone can tell Parliament what has occurred and render an account of his stewardship." (Maxwell-Fyfe, cited by Gay & Powell, 2004, p.12)

This is another example of Haldane being woven into the governing fabric. The current Ministerial Code makes it clear that 'Ministers have a duty to Parliament to account, and be held to account for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and agencies' (Cabinet Office (2), 2015, p.1). In plain language: Ministers are accountable for the actions of their officials. History suggests that many Ministerial careers have failed because of the actions taken by Civil Servants (see Gay & Powell, 2004, particularly Pp 14-37). I cite David Blunkett's views in Chapter Two concerning the resignation of Bev Hughes in 2004: he considers it grossly unfair that she had to step down because she was supplied with erroneous information by her Civil Servants. McNaughton (2015. p.6) cites the examples of Michael Howard and Derek Lewis (Director of the Prison Service in 1995) and Iain Duncan Smith and Sir Robert Devereux (his Permanent Secretary, in 2013). For McNaughton, the first fallout illustrates the accountability problem that is tied to the convention and the second shows the conflict and constitutional confusion that result when a Minister feels compelled to publicly criticise one of their own Civil Servants (ibid).

[1] Derived from the judgment in: Carltona Ltd v Works Comrs [1943] 2 All ER 560 (CA).

[2] See, for example, Lord Hennessy's comments in the debate he called in 2014 (Hansard, 2014, columns 354-355).

Haldane helped define relationships in government through much of the twentieth century. But it was challenged in the 1980s by Margaret Thatcher's approach to the civil service and by the rise of New Public Management.

Thatcher and New Public Management

Margaret Thatcher significantly altered the relationship between Ministers and Civil Servants during her tenure as Prime Minister. She connected a bloated civil service, artificially protected from economic storms, with ways of working that she characterised as "…an obstacle to good administration" (Thatcher, 2011, p.47). By her own admission "she took a close interest in senior appointments in the civil service from the first…" (ibid, p.46) citing their importance in terms of morale and efficiency. Reflecting on a dismal meeting of Permanent Secretaries at the start of her tenure, where she sensed an acute aversion to change, she decided on her approach:

> "It became clear to me that it was only by encouraging or appointing individuals, rather than trying to change attitudes *en bloc*, that progress would be made. And that was to be the method I employed." (Thatcher, 2011, Pp. 48-49).

Subsequent analysis confirms that this is exactly what occurred. Thatcher favoured "can do-ers" over those who operated more traditionally (Richards, 1997, King, 2015, Page, 2010, p.414). She dominated the senior appointment process (Richards, 1997, p.133-151). Whilst she did not overtly politicise the Civil Service, she did personalise it. This in turn affected the culture and socialisation of Whitehall, exactly as she intended. Those searching for rapid promotion looked to ensure that they reflected the values of managerialism and positivity that Thatcher personally valued – causing a "centre effect" (ibid, p.176). The traditional role of the Civil Servant as "congenital snag-hunter" (to borrow Hugh Dalton's acerbic phrase) was diminished as a result.

Sir Ian Bancroft, who was moved out of his role early in Thatcher's tenure, was seen as one of the old guard – confident enough to speak truth to power without fear of the consequences (Stanley, 2015, Hennessy, 2011). He bemoaned the tendency among some Civil Servants to "make their advice what Ministers want to hear rather than what they need to know" (cited by Ponting, 1989, p.37). Reward was on offer for those who delivered, rather than those that questioned (Dowding, 1995, p.112). Those that wanted to prosper

needed to re-conceptualise their relationships with Ministers, focusing on being able to deliver political priorities, rather than to test their foundations. This in itself meant that the indivisibility grounded in Haldane began to be diluted within Whitehall.

Intertwined with Thatcher's personal reaction to the Civil Service, was a move towards managerialism. Prior to the 1980s, the field of public policy was generally labelled as "public administration". This was characterised in post-war Britain by a vision of statehood where public administration met the social and economic needs of its citizens (Osborne, 2010). The 1960s and 1970s saw a loss of faith in Whitehall and officialdom, with traditional methods of statehood no longer going unchallenged (Richards and Smith, 2000). In the 1970s, as Jonathan Powell puts it, "The Civil Service were in control as a series of weak and short-lived governments, Labour and Conservative, succeeded each other" (Powell, 2010, p.58). The perceived inadequacies of the Civil Service, combined with its perceived power, also seemed to coincide with the end of "public administration" as a credible organising philosophy.

In the 1980s, this perspective gave way to what became known as 'New Public Management' (NPM), as retrospectively labelled by Hood (1991). Exactly what NPM means has been the subject of ongoing debate, but features include: added attention to private sector management techniques; an emphasis on "management" itself; an increased distinction and distance between policy-makers and implementers; an emphasis on entrepreneurial leadership; added focus on inputs, outputs, cost and evaluation; and increased out-sourcing of public services (adapted from Osborne, 2010; also see Massey & Pyper, 2005). Separating service delivery and management, and increasing efficiency through the pursuit of private contracts are other key features of NPM that Osborne and Gaebler (1993) identify both conceptually, and in the actions of the Thatcher government. Richards and Smith (2016) argue that Thatcher's embrace of NPM was not purely borne of a desire to increase management efficiency[3]; it was intrinsic to her political philosophy[4]. Her approach was to divide the indivisible: through changing the nature of her Civil Servants' roles. This was done by pushing them to manage, to deliver, and to implement; rather than

[3] This is further explored in Chapter Two- where I cite the views of Hughes (1998); and Massey and Pyper (2005) – in corroboration of the view that politics is intrinsic to NPM in the UK.

[4] Former Civil Servant Clive Ponting adopts a similar view – suggesting that Heath and Thatcher's attempt "to import a more professional style of management from the private sector…(was)… motivated more by an ideological or instinctive dislike of the public sector." (Ponting, 1989, p.11).

just to create and critique policy in tandem with Ministers[5]. Through implicitly rejecting the traditional model, under the auspices of management efficiency, she took steps to covertly politicise Whitehall (ibid, Pp 9-10).

Haldane undermined?

Thatcher's own willingness to remove Ministers who she did not consider were delivering meant that Ministers were incentivised to adopt her philosophy in dealing with their own Civil Servants. The relationship had moved from a collaborative to a hierarchical one and "…the conception of the minister's role established by Thatcher has remained the prevailing conception ever since" (King, 2015, p.181). Hughes (2010) suggests that the most important change for civil servants was that they were now responsible for achieving results and needed to take personal responsibility. In effect, a more transactional, principal-agent relationship had emerged.

As summarised by Burnham and Horton (2013), a principal - agent relationship is based on an assumption that the agent (the Civil Servant in this case) pursues their own self-interest. It also generally assumes there is an intrinsic conflict between the goals of the principal (the Minister) and the agent. In the private sector this would be a contractual and conflictual relationship. The way Thatcher perceived the motivations of her Civil Servants was in direct contradiction to the motivations assumed in the Westminster model – that officials serve a higher cause, that they can be trusted (ibid, p.32) and that they embody the public service ethos (see Richards and Smith, 2000). Thatcher saw officials as "budget maximisers" who were driven by self-interest, not national interest (Smith, 2015, Pp 73-75). In other words, they were acting on the basis of "rational choice". Campbell and Wilson (1995, p. 304) are fiercely critical of the traction that rational choice theory established in the field of political science. By moving the relationship to a principal – agent footing, Thatcher incentivised Civil Servants to behave in certain ways.

The change to the nature of Ministerial – Civil Servant relationship that occurred under Thatcher has not been reversed. New Labour strengthened central power – informally through the important decisions Blair took with his trusted set of friends and advisors; and formally through the creation of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) – which gave

[5] For example: "Some Permanent Secretaries had come to think of themselves mainly as policy advisers, forgetting that they were also responsible for the efficient management of their departments." (Thatcher, 2011, p.47).

Number Ten a crucial role in the creation of policy (Richards, 2008, particularly Pp 124-129). This federalisation of power meant that civil servants and departmental ministers had additional elements to factor into their interactions (namely, the prior actions, and likely reactions, of Number 10). The high profile afforded to Public Service Agreements (PSAs), chimed with the previous evolution of more transactional and principal–agent relationships within government.

One key consequence of the altered relationship is the contraction of deliberative space for officials (Richards and Smith, 2016). King and Crewe (2013) chronicle government blunders over a number of years and find that a "deficit of deliberation" exists, in a system where there are limited opportunities for veto. In addition, King (2015, p.196) suggests that various policy failures could have been prevented if the civil servants involved had not feared being seen to be obstructive in their Minister's eyes. As Foster and Plowden (1996) put it:

> "…changes to the civil service, whilst managerially desirable, have weakened its capacity to act in an advisory capacity and weakened the ethos which allowed it to restrain ministerial excess without giving it the skills or authority to undertake the managerial roles now required." (ibid, p. 245).

Governments in recent years have also adopted a more pluralistic approach to the policy process – removing the monopoly that Civil Servants use to hold. This intention is set out in the most recent reform plan (Cabinet Office, 2012), and one recent example of this in practice is the commissioning of the IPPR to conduct an investigation about accountability arrangements in other jurisdictions (IPPR, 2013). With an increasing suite of policy sources open to Ministers, there is a risk that Civil Servants could be tempted to further moderate their advice in order to retain their individual policy stake.

Things change – what's the problem?

Whilst the extent to which the factors outlined above have changed the governing relationship can be questioned, there is little doubt that the relationship has changed from Thatcher's term onwards. This raises the question: what is the problem with this change?

One answer is that the quality of the governing executive may have suffered. The challenge to the public service ethos, the changing incentives (with rewards for those operating on the basis of an arguably cynical rational choice mindset) and the diminution of capacity and space for deliberation and advice are unlikely to have improved things in my view.

A second answer is that the official, constitutional position has *not* changed – and it is this disparity between the altered reality on the ground, and the unaltered official position that is problematic. Haldane is still pervasive: the Civil Service code, the Cabinet Manual, and the Carltona doctrine are all contemporary examples predicated on the classic Westminster model. Successive governments show no appetite to make any changes to the official constitutional position or question the key underlying principles. A recent example is the coalition government's rejection of the Public Administration Select Committee's (2013) recommendation that a Parliamentary Commission is held into the future of the Civil Service. The current constitutional framework for the relationship is being pushed far beyond its design specifications.

This raises a further question: if there is a problem with the established constitutional position, why do Ministers and Civil Servants defend it? There are a number of possible answers. Richards and Smith (2000) suggest it may be to protect a set of mutually beneficial power relationships (i.e. for both Ministers and Civil Servants). The same authors also contend that relationships within government rely on the Westminster tradition, and individual relationships fail when one side or other deviate from the script (2004). For this reason, the narratives behind each perspective sustain ('historical impact' for Ministers, and 'constitutional propriety' for officials) (ibid, Pp 797-799). Rhodes (2011) suggests that actors in Whitehall play out their beliefs about the constitution in their interactions with Ministers and with each other – and so the mythology endures. Richards and Smith (2016) also suggest that the consequences of admitting any deficiency in the status quo would be a possible diminution in power for those in the executive, and the end to a system which is essentially self-regulating.

I would add a further answer here: given the complexities and priorities inherent in modern government, I think that there is little *incentive* for any administration to address an extremely difficult problem with minimal electoral traction. I doubt there is a "simple" solution, and I suspect any answer would span electoral cycles (needing ratification across the political spectrum), and would be hugely controversial if precepts such as

independence and permanence were challenged. Put simply, I do not think there is the political appetite[6]. The Fulton report did not deal with ministerial – civil service relations, so it is ninety-eight years since the last strategic view was taken (Haldane). My view concerning the limited prospects for a constitutional overhaul has also determined my focus on individual relationships within the existing framework in this thesis.

Other tensions on the relationship – the demand for greater accountability

A connection can be drawn between NPM and demands for clearer accountability in government. My contention is that the inward focus of NPM has actually made it more difficult for the public to understand who is democratically accountable for what. Ferlie et al. (2007, P.205) argue that managerialism has compounded problems concerning accountability by exposing the difficulty of drawing a line between policy and operations. Deleon (2007, Pp 103-105) summarises the body of opinion that suggests NPM reduces citizens to customers and therefore excludes them from rightful democratic participation. These authors consider NPM weakens democratic institutions by assuming passivity on behalf of the public. A connection is also drawn between entrepreneurship and rule bending – with markets rarely serving the public interest. Lynn (2010, p.110) also states that "relegating democratic institutions..." is a key weakness of NPM. This is an important line of argument, especially given the contact points that most citizens have with the state. Frustration with bureaucracy is highlighted by my interviewees in Chapter Six.

Greater accountability is also being demanded by parliament – particularly through the Select Committee System. These committees scrutinise performance and hold the executive to account for its actions. The Osmotherly rules set out the approach officials should adopt if summoned to appear. The rules state that officials must answer questions in a manner approved by their Minister. They also give Ministers a role in deciding which official should be permitted to appear (Dowding, 1995, Hennessy, 1990). During the Westland affair a letter was leaked by a Civil Servant, but the Cabinet Secretary Sir Robert Armstrong refused to allow a select committee to speak to the Civil Servants under suspicion. In accordance with Osmotherly, he maintained that Civil Servants had no constitutional personality or responsibility separate from the elected Government (Dowding, 1995, Pp. 152-153).

[6] As cited later in this Chapter, the Institute for Government (2014) ascribe the problem with the most recent Civil Service reform programme as a practical one – it was not high enough on the agenda of Ministers and senior officials.

Select committees have an increasingly democratic mandate. Chairs and members are now elected by MPs, independent of Whips, in response to the Wright committee's report (Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, 2009, Pp. 15-30). Their rapid evolution and rising profile are making them an extremely important part of our parliamentary system. They expose the extreme tension between demands for greater accountability and Haldaneian inseparability. If their strength and influence continues to grow, the tension they have to bear is likely to grow accordingly. Margaret Hodge is one former Chair agitating for change as a result:

> "The old tradition of civil servants being accountable to ministers, and ministers being accountable to Parliament, is broken… ministers feel furious when they've got to defend what they see as mistakes made by civil servants, and civil servants feel absolutely livid if they feel they've got to defend ridiculous decisions made by ministers – and nobody wins! That's why I think you have to revisit the whole constitutional settlement about civil service and ministerial accountability, and open it up a little bit… You can't say that civil servants are accountable to ministers who are accountable to Parliament if ministers can't hire and fire those civil servants… It's a nonsense." (Hodge, 2014)

It is an eloquent characterisation of the difficulties that Haldane's legacy presents for both sides. Unsurprisingly, Senior Civil Servants have hit back at both Hodge's style and substance (Guardian 2012; Penman 2012). Baroness Quin has described the terminology used in select committee hearings as "…more redolent of criminal proceedings…" (Quin, 2010, p.124)[7]. However for Hodge and others, this is one area where parliament is accurately reflecting societal demands for openness and accountability – and the executive is simply not keeping up.

[7] John Hutton and Leigh Lewis – a former Minister and Permanent Secretary respectively – are astute in warning that the way in which the Public Accounts Committee operates actually risks further institutionalising risk aversion in the Civil Service (Hutton & Lewis, 2014, Pp 133-142) – one of the very behaviours that the Ministers I spoke to despaired of (see Chapter Five). This is because the consequences of an innovative idea that fails are so personally and reputationally severe, that most will not want to take the risk. As they put it: "Few, if any, Permanent Secretaries have been hauled before the PAC for simply doing averagely well this year what they did averagely well last." (ibid, p.139).

Other tensions on relationships – the rise of the special advisors

The increasing prevalence of Special Advisors (SpAds) is both indicative of the approach of recent governments, and another factor which can add pressure to Ministerial – Civil Servant relations. SpAds are politically appointed, temporary civil servants. While outside advisers have been employed by politicians from as far back as the early twentieth century, their recognition as a group dates back to the 1960s and 1970s (Yong & Hazell, 2014, Pp 17-18).

Historical data suggests that in the last year of the Major administration (1996-7), there were a total of 38 SpAds employed (BBC, 2014). In June 2010 the total was 61 SpAds (Cabinet Office, 2010). According to recent figures, 103 SpAds were employed as of November 2014 (Cabinet Office, 2014). The recent implementation of Extended Ministerial Offices also allows external advisers to be recruited (Cabinet Office (2), 2013). Special advisors add a complicating factor to relationships within government. As I discuss more fully in Chapter Four, when SpAds are used appropriately they can be of great advantage to all involved; when they are not relationships can become dysfunctional. Their increasing presence is an additional variable for Ministers and Civil Servants to manage as part of their relationship.

Other tensions on the relationship – societal expectations

The changing expectations that society has about Government performance have provoked a vigorous debate amongst academics: some suggest this is a "supply" based problem (i.e. that Government and the wider political class needs to alter its approach in line with civic society's needs); others suggest that it is a "demand" based problem (i.e. that societal demands of Government are now simply unrealistic and people refuse to fulfil their own civic responsibilities in return). For a comprehensive summary see Richards (2014, Pp 15-38) and Hood and Dixon (2015) who consider further research is required concerning the 'changing context' for government[8]. Regardless of the arguments about causation, these pressures are all affecting relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants.

[8] One potential explanation Hood and Dixon (2015) provide for the apparently underwhelming impact of UK government reforms – in terms of cost and administrative quality - is that the social context may have changed: "In particular, changes in the size and composition of the population and its behaviour and attitudes might possibly have served to override what might otherwise have been

There has been a move towards pluralism in terms of the sources of advice that the government is prepared to consult. But service delivery has also become more pluralistic. In an interview conducted in support of related research, former Cabinet Secretary Lord Butler told me that increased societal demands had fundamentally altered the transaction between the Government and the public:

> "I think that government has become very much more complex and the public demand for good public services, but not only good public services but services tailored to their particular needs, has developed. That puts pressure on politicians to deliver and politicians put pressure on civil servants, so there's been a much greater emphasis on outcomes and also things not going wrong. Whereas again, when I started, one size fits all was very much more acceptable."

The twenty four hour news cycle and the intensity of media scrutiny have also had consequences for the relationship. Civil Servants need to retain their impartiality, presenting the Government's position in the best light without straying into political territory. This is not the easiest boundary to tread. New Labour's election in 1997 appeared to herald a culture shock for some Civil Servants who were not prepared for the demands that the new administration made of them, and were not equipped to respond[9]. In addition the Freedom of Information Act and the ubiquity of social media have led to increasing transparency in Government, and fuelled demands for ever more transparency[10] (Bertot, Jaeger and Grimes, 2012). One consequence of this has been that the presentation of policy

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the decisively cost-reducing and quality improving effects of successive makeovers of the administrative machine." (ibid, p.187).

[9] For example, a former Senior Civil Servant, who I interviewed as part of related research, told me that the Civil Service were initially slow to react to the new approach to the media that New Labour instigated in 1997: "So some ministers can be frustrated in what they see as a slow pace of the civil service. Rebuttal being the order of the day with Labour and I think the civil service was slow to realise how quickly ministers wanted to get material back from us and it came across therefore as ponderous and slow." Baroness Armstrong, one of the former Ministers I spoke to, also told me about a shambolic visit to a homeless shelter early in the New Labour era. She told me that her Department's press officers "…just were terrified. That was one of the reasons why we reorganised media, I mean I got such a shock because that was bread and butter compared to what we'd had to do in opposition ourselves." Personal interviews with the author.

[10] Recent data released by the Ministry of Justice illustrates the general trend: "Between Q3 2006 and Q3 2014 the number of FOI requests recorded by monitored bodies increased by 63%. In the third quarter of 2014, monitored central government bodies received 11,234 non-routine Freedom of Information (FOI) requests." (Ministry of Justice, 2014, p.6).

and the anticipation of future data access requests are now part of everyday reality within Whitehall.

Other tensions on relationships – civil service reform

As summarised, in my assessment there was a political element to the civil service reforms instigated by Thatcher in the 1980s. There has been an apparent shift towards managerialism, localism and individuals being asked to take responsibility for delivery, and to account for it. Societal expectations can also be seen as a driver for these reforms. The Next Steps initiative was perhaps the most significant structural change – it sought to increase efficiency through separating out delivery functions. The recent Civil Service Reform plan emphasises policy capability, tightening accountability and strengthening skills (Cabinet Office, 2012). The IPPR report (2013) commissioned by the coalition administration also focuses on accountability and responsiveness. The authors suggest that responsiveness and independence are two values that need to be balanced, but that this is not a zero sum game (ibid).

Between 2010 and 2015, the Minister for the Civil Service was Francis Maude. He was unapologetic about his aims, one of which was "…how to address persistent weaknesses that downsizing has exposed more starkly" (Cabinet Office, 2012, p.3). He also attributed part of the drive for reform to societal demands: "The public wants change... The public wants services to be delivered better" (ibid, p.4). Whilst Maude has always denied briefing anonymously against Civil Servants[11], commentators have suggested that this has been a feature of his tenure.[12] In a personal interview, as part of related research, I asked Lord Butler about recent criticism of the Civil Service by Ministers. He was forthright in his response:

> "Well I have got views. I regret it. I think that quite a lot of it stems from politicians, from Ministers expecting Civil Servants to do things that are impossible and putting requirements on them in response to public pressure. Like, for example, putting

[11] In a recent interview, Francis Maude, when asked about anonymous briefings said "Not from me, or my team" (Civil Service World, 2015).

[12] For example, Peter Oborne, writing in the Daily Telegraph: "Unfortunately friends and allies of Mr Maude have a long and disgraceful record of briefing journalists against civil servants." (Oborne, 2014).

> targets to reduce the number of asylum seekers. Well if you've also got rules that state when people should be given asylum it may not be possible to reconcile these two things. So that's the sort of unfair pressure that can be put on Civil Servants."

What the quotation above exposes is one of the inherent contradictions in the system. Richards and Smith (2016, p.32) make a related point about the extent to which Ministers are prepared to devolve power: "No government has been able to reconcile the desire for decentralised implementation outside of the civil service with the desire to retain ministerial control (and of course it cannot be reconciled), which is why targets remain an important tool." In 2014, five former Cabinet Secretaries spoke in a debate called by Lord Hennessy about the future of the Civil Service (Hansard, 2014). It is noteworthy that they felt compelled to make the case for the defence of the Civil Service in such strident terms.

There are considerable questions over whether the recent programme of reform has been successful. The Cabinet Office's own assessment, in July 2013, was that "…too little of what was set out to be delivered by this point has been fully executed." (Cabinet Office (1), 2013, p.4). The Institute for Government praises the Civil Service's response to the previous administration's agenda, but suggests that the reform programme has underwhelmed (2014, p.7). The report goes on to criticise the failure of politicians to get sufficient buy-in from civil service leaders, and criticises leadership in the Civil Service.

I consider a broader study about the effectiveness of central Government reform over thirty years in Chapter Two (Hood & Dixon, 2015). One potential explanation its authors advance for the apparent failure of reform (on their measure) is that "…what was said on the tin did not convey the real purpose of those makeovers or, if it did, that it failed to take account of all the ways that well-placed interests could make use of the makeovers for their own benefit." (ibid, p.191). Hood and Dixon question the success of managerialism. Their contention is that reform is not as simple as it is often presented as being – neither in terms of how it is conceived, what it is motivated by, or how it is judged. The broader point is this: some of the most important changes to the interaction between civil servants and ministers have come from the behaviours and attitudes of political leaders, rather than their administration's official articulation of reform policies. Thatcher's "can-doer" preference and Blair's centralisation of the policy process, serve as two examples.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I have set out the challenges to the Westminster model and Haldane. It seems clear that the relationship between Ministers and Civil Servants has been altered. The behaviours and attitudes of certain administrations and Prime Ministers are likely to have been critical to this change. The Westminster model is dealing with variables it was not designed to. The symbiosis of Haldane is being challenged. One consequence appears to be a contraction of the deliberative space at the heart of government. King and Crewe (2013) suggest that this lies behind a number of failures. The dissonance between the changed reality and the frozen constitutional position is problematic. It appears to be putting pressure on individual relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants within government. In addition, other factors are increasing this tension. These include demands for greater accountability, an increase in special advisors, changing societal expectations, and recurring civil service reform initiatives. In reality, these other factors are interlinked – societal expectation, for example, may underlie demands for greater accountability. Relationships may be getting more difficult as a consequence.

In my assessment, radical, formal change to the long-standing constitutional framework underpinning the relationship is unlikely in the near future. There is a lack of consensus across the political spectrum for change. No viable alternatives to the official lines of accountability derived from the Westminster model have yet been developed (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, p.147). Elected governments are reluctant to cede implicit ministerial power – which a clarification of roles would almost certainly require. Given this scenario, the majority of my research focuses on the personal, human relationships at the heart of Government. I have decided to concentrate on the interaction between Ministers and Civil Servants in this research – because I think that improvements can still be made to relationships *within the existing paradigm*. A paradigm which I consider will prevail for now, despite the difficulties I have outlined. The insights and experiences of former Ministers are used as a basis for trying to optimise individual relationships. This is territory which is often overlooked.

CHAPTER TWO - MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the previous Chapter, I explained why relationships in government may be coming under increasing strain. I concluded that a formal constitutional overhaul of ministerial – official relationships is unlikely. As a result, the focus of this thesis is on relationships within the existing paradigm. In this Chapter, I review the published literature, especially in respect of Ministerial perceptions of civil servants. The major source for this material is ministerial memoirs and diaries. Two other broad sets of sources are considered: material produced by Civil Servants; and academic material (including an examination of NPM). The sources are not of equal weight or possibly value. Personal accounts of actions are likely to be highly biased. Unsurprisingly there are considerably more accounts by politicians than officials.

Ministerial Literature (Memoirs and Diaries)

Relationships between Ministers and officials feature in a number of political diaries and memoirs. They can hardly be considered as unbiased accounts of events although they do provide some insight into the perceptions of ministers. The motivation of any politician who writes a diary or memoir is an important factor. Baroness Shirley Williams provides the following reflections on her erstwhile Cabinet colleague, Richard Crossman's diaries:

> "Dick Crossman's diaries are not an accurate reflection of what actually happened, they're an excessive reflection of what Dick Crossman *wanted to think people thought* that he did...Dick suddenly appeared on the scene (as a) huge, influential character, whereas most of us thought that he was much the same as the rest of us." (Williams, 2011).

Crossman literally and metaphorically wrote his own part – he was unlikely to diminish his own importance, nor to downplay the systemic failings he perceived – which he saw as frustrating his decisions and ambitions. This is particularly important as Crossman arguably set the mould. It is unlikely that any politician will not be motivated by some degree of self-interest, or the desire to construct their legacy in terms most favourable to them. As Ken Clarke puts it:

> "I have read colleagues' memoirs which contained what I think (are) glaring mis-statements of fact or recollection…far too many of my contemporaries' memoirs could be subtitled *Why I was always right but my colleagues did not understand it at the time* and also taking credit for things which I seem to recall they were against is another shameless thing that takes place." (Public Administration Select Committee, 2009, Ev 45).

Shirley Williams and Ken Clarke do not use the language of social psychology but identify what we might describe as hindsight and self-serving bias, along with choice supporting memory distortion. Nonetheless I have considered the individual, personal insights of Ministers, rather than considering them as de-personalised, formal actors and have used diaries and memoirs as source material. I chose a sample of Ministerial literature to read. The sample spans different time periods (1960s through to 2010), political administrations, strength of administration (the thin majorities of the 1970s compared to the large majorities of selected administrations during the Thatcher and Blair years) and ranks of politicians (from the most junior Ministers to Prime Ministers). Memoirs are more common than diaries, and my selection also reflects that. I have not attempted to stratify my findings against these factors, because I do not think this would be viable or revealing given the nature of the material I am considering and the size of the sample (see Appendix I for a list). Two clear themes emerged: the tendency of Civil Servants to seek control; and concerns about their competency.

Control

One of the most prevalent themes identifiable in the Ministerial literature is what I have broadly categorised as 'control'. This is where Ministers consider that their Civil Servants are seeking to control or dominate them. Richard Crossman, at times, felt in danger of being a cog in the Civil Service machine. After his first few days as a Cabinet Minister in 1964 he remarked:

> 'The Private Secretary's job is to make sure that when the Minister comes into Whitehall he doesn't let the side or himself down and behaves in accordance with the requirements of the institution…one has only to do absolutely nothing to be floated forward on the stream.' (Crossman, 1979, p.25).

Crossman uses similar imagery in assessing the weakness of the Wilson cabinet in 1965, when he talks of the government 'drifting along, with our momentum halted and the Civil Service taking over more each day' (ibid, p.113). Crossman also considered the cabinet committee system, and the way minutes were taken, greatly strengthened the Civil Service's hand – illustrating their version of what happened, in accordance with their expectations of what should have happened – with Ministerial discussion lost in the margins (ibid, Pp. 92-93).

Michael Heseltine mentions Civil Servants who would 'skilfully draft the likely conclusions to every meeting long before the meeting itself takes place' (Heseltine, 2000, p.489). Dennis Healey thought that the UK Civil Service "…had no intellectual superior in the world" (Healey, 1989, p.376), although he considered that vast intellect was often used to stifle initiative and change, and that "...the Treasury knew the price of everything and the value of nothing." (ibid). Civil Servants may take a longer term view, and will often be categorised as conservative in nature, and protectors of the status quo (Hennessy, 1990, p.492 and Mottram, 2008, p.4).

Roy Jenkins, having just been appointed Home Secretary in 1966, describes a battle of wills with his Permanent Secretary, Sir Charles Cunningham, who oversaw all Ministerial submissions; which he had reduced to two pages – with no background documents supplied to Ministers. Jenkins thought this was absurdly hierarchical and provided no evidential basis for Ministerial decisions. He overhauled the system (reducing Sir Charles to tears and precipitating his retirement) – and marvelled at the failure of his last three Ministerial predecessors to have tolerated such control (Jenkins, 1991, Pp 181-185). One manifestation of Civil Service 'control' will be in the balance of the advice that Civil Servants provide, especially if it appears skewed. Ernest Bevin, when Minister of Labour in the 1940's, dealt with the so called "Whitehall veto" masterfully:

> 'You've just given me twenty good reasons why I can't do this; I'm sure clever chaps like you can go away and produce twenty good reasons why I can.' (cited by Hennessy, 1990, Pp. 497-498).

Ministers sometimes feel that the Civil Service does not support a certain policy, and the rationale for their reluctance is created retrospectively. This can often leave the advice against action looking slightly ludicrous. Jim Callaghan, recalling his time as a Junior

Transport Minister in the late 1940s, refers to the scrap he had with his officials over the introduction of Catseyes to Britain's roads:

> "…officials in the Ministry of Transport were strongly opposed to their use on trunk roads, and I had to use all my powers of persuasion before I eventually overrode the Department. The principal objection of one official was that to place the studs on the crown of the road would encourage car-owners to drive in the middle during a fog and a dreadful series of collisions would follow." (Callaghan, 1987, p.97).

Tony Benn (1996, Pp 287, 293-4, 302-3) describes a dispute with his "impossible" Permanent Secretary, Antony Part, who he considered was trying to undermine his industrial policy at every turn[13]. Benn advances another potential motivation for the Civil Service's desire to resist reform in this instance: "This is the way in which the Department of Industry acts, simply as a mouthpiece for the CBI, and this is what I won't have." (ibid, p. 287). Former Prime Minister John Major corroborates Benn's point in his memoir:

> "Whitehall has a tendency to lapse into cosy relationships with the representatives of public service providers. This is preferable to hostility, but it must not prevent rigorous scrutiny being advocated or upheld as it so often has in the past." (Major, 2000, p. 262).

Alan Clark thought that his officials delighted in tying him in knots, and talks of them browbeating him as a team, with "one bespectacled *Guardian* reader in sole charge of each 'Scheme'", as Clark 'blunders around like a bull on sawdust with the picadors galloping round him sticking in their horrid barbed *banderillas*' (Clark, 1993, p.22). David Blunkett was deeply troubled by what he saw as undue interference on behalf of senior Civil Servants; he writes scathingly about the approach of his permanent secretary in 2001, suggesting that a set of aims and objections he had produced had been rewritten by the permanent secretary, demonstrating how the 'senior Civil Service seek to interfere if the Secretary of State is prepared to let them' (Blunkett, 2006, p.275). Chris Mullin finds a chance meeting with a former private secretary insightful. The official in question rated him as a good Minister because Mullin "...turned up on time, did your work and did as you were

[13] As Dowding (1995) points out: "Most of the published memoirs of Labour politicians and policy advisers of the 1964-1970 government suggested an undirected but nonetheless conspirational civil service thwarting their plans" (ibid, Pp. 63-64).

told" (Mullin, 2010, p.191). The synergy with Crossman's words, relating to his experience in 1964, is obvious.

I have considered Margaret Thatcher's overall approach to the Civil Service in Chapter One, but the control theme is clearly evident in her memoirs. One example concerns the NHS. On a visit to the Department of Health and Social Security, some of the Civil Servants she spoke to countered her suggestion that hospitals with excess land should sell this to the private sector and spend the proceeds on patients. One of the arguments put to her was that "…this was somehow unfair on those hospitals which did not have the good fortune to have surplus land" (Thatcher, 2011, p.47). For her this was indicative of the "desire for no change" and complemented her overall conclusion that the civil service thought it "could be insulated from a reforming zeal that would transform Britain's public and private institutions…" (ibid, p.48).

Not all of the literature I have read suggests that Ministers consider their Civil Servants behave like this. A number of Ministers are well aware of the positive qualities of their Civil Servants. Douglas Hurd says he only ever had one private secretary that he could not "invite to become a confidant and friend" (Hurd, 2003, p.320). Nigel Lawson is generally positive about the Civil Service, and talks of working harmoniously with them (Lawson, 1992). Alan Clark, often fiercely critical, commends the loyalty and support of his private office staff (Clark, 1993, p. 390). Lord Howe specifically praised the attitude he found from officials in the Treasury when he arrived there in 1979 (Howe, 1995, p.127).

Baronness Joyce Quin is also more measured in her approach than some of the diarists I have cited. She puts most mistakes made by Civil Servants down to "…understandable human error or an organisational failure rather than the result of hidden agendas." (Quin, 2010, Pp. 127-8).

The control theme seems to have some longitudinal consistency over a number of years. However, from the literature I considered, it appeared most clearly in accounts written prior to Thatcher's rebalancing of power towards Ministers in the 1980s. It also emerges strongly in the accounts of politicians who could be characterised as more radical in their approach (e.g. Crossman, Benn, and Clark). One potential explanation is that those with the highest expectations of power may have been most disappointed by the constraints

imposed by reality, particularly at a time before power was rebalanced towards Ministers (as explored in Chapter One).

Competency

One of the less nuanced views that the literature reveals is that Ministers think that many Civil Servants are simply incompetent. Richard Crossman had an obviously sceptical attitude to the Civil Service as an entity. He was surprised and disappointed that the Radcliffe report of 1967 was not accepted by Harold Wilson. This report confirmed to him the 'total lackadaisicalness of the Civil Service' (Crossman, 1979, p.356). Crossman was disappointed with the drafting skills of those tasked with summarising a Bill (ibid, p.43) and heard that a quarter of social security claimants were getting less than they were entitled to due to the incompetence of staff (ibid, p.480). These are some of many references to Crossman's dissatisfaction with the quality of his Civil Servants' work.

Tony Benn's diaries also suggest that he had a dim view about the competence of the Civil Service. When Postmaster-General, he delights in the appointment of a private secretary who "…is free from the usual Civil Service rubbish…" (Benn, 1996, p.118). He also recounts a wonderful exchange with Sir Donald Banks, who had been the first Director General of the Post Office in 1934. At that time the Postmaster General would appear twice a week:

> "All the minutes for him to sign would then be laid around a long table in his office and he would walk round and sign them one after the other, have another glass of port and then disappear…senior civil servants worked from 10AM to 4.30PM…Life was leisurely…But it was during those years that the rest of the world caught up with and overtook us." (ibid, p.152).

Benn here, as with Crossman earlier in this section, is one of the few Ministers to imply that a historical link exists between perceived laziness and competence.

Margaret Thatcher identified clear incompetence in the Civil Service Department (CSD), on a visit early in 1980, which confirmed many of her worst fears:

> "I met able and conscientious people attempting to manage and monitor the activities of civil servants in departments of which they knew little, in policy areas of which they knew even less. Because the staff of other departments were aware of the disadvantages under which the CSD worked, they took scant notice of the recommendations they received from it" (Thatcher, 2011, p. 48).

Thatcher here recognises that the incompetence identified relates closely to the structure of Whitehall, and also that power relationships between departments will closely influence the individual behaviours of civil servants within those departments. She scrapped the CSD shortly after her visit.

David Blunkett's diaries make his opinions about the competency of the Civil Service quite clear. A good example is his impassioned view about the handling of the deaths of several cockle pickers – a tragic episode that also cost Bev Hughes, the Home Office Minister in charge of the policy, her job:

> "…Jonathan Baum[14]…had the absolute audacity to say that so often Ministers blame Civil Servants for decisions that they had taken…(but) so often Ministers cover for Civil Servants who are utterly useless, incompetent and ineffective. In…(the case of Bev Hughes)…this was demonstrated by the gross misinformation she had been given to put in a letter to Geraldine Smith, about the particular actions and interventions in relation to gangmasters and cockle pickers." (Blunkett, 2006, p.607).

Blunkett's diary is one of the most fiercely critical I have read – and there are numerous entries that speak directly to the incompetence theme. He bemoans the fact that the best way to remove an incompetent Civil Servant is to promote them (ibid, p.314); he comments on the "total dsyfunctionality" of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office (ibid, p.618); and again remarks upon the downfall of Bev Hughes referred to above, saying that they had previously requested the official who had produced the faulty report be moved, to no avail (ibid, p. 630). Gerald Kaufman, whose *Guide to being a Minister* is a key text on the relationship, is also alive to the fact that the Civil Service can abdicate all responsibility for a difficult decision if it wishes to, presenting very neutral advice to a Minister – and effectively 'washing their hands' of it (Kaufman, 1997, p.122).

[14] Jonathan Baum was General Secretary of the First Division Association of Senior Civil Servants.

Jonathan Powell may not have been a Government Minister, but his perceptions on the relationship are also of interest. He cites an example of Civil Service incompetence through the lens of fatalism. He recalls a Home Office team giving a presentation about how the crime rate would rise 'inexorably' because the economy was growing and thus more temptation was put in the way of criminals. When Powell asked what would happen if there was a recession the official said 'crime would rise because people would be deprived and more of them would have to resort to robbery to survive.' (Powell, 2010, p.72). He is also critical of the capacity of individual departments to produce "original thought". He considered them very weak in policy making as Thatcher had hollowed them out (ibid, p.180).

Douglas Hurd praises the quality of oral briefing that quite junior Civil Servants in the Home Office would frequently provide (Hurd, 2003, p.351). Although Tony Blair's relationship with the Civil Service was at times extremely controversial, he was also able to appreciate its qualities:

> "The Civil Service had and has great strengths. It was and is impartial. It is, properly directed, a formidable machine. At times of crisis, superb. Its people are intelligent, hard-working and dedicated to public service." (Blair, 2010, p.206)

Blair, however, also says that the Civil Service was out of date – and that inertia was problem (ibid, p.19) – hence his moves to reform it.

The competency theme also appears to have some longitudinal consistency – but was slightly more prominent in the sample of post Thatcherite material I read. As noted above, Jonathan Powell makes a direct link between Thatcher's approach and the subsequent inability of departments to innovate and create. There is a clear consistency here with my contention in Chapter One concerning the changes that occurred under Thatcher.

Civil Service Literature (Memoirs and Training Material/Academic Papers)

Whilst material written by former Civil Servants is very limited because of the constitutional convention of impartiality - some valuable insights can still be gleaned. No clear and consistent central themes emerge, but a series of more isolated observations are still of value. I have split the literature between memoirs and training material/academic papers.

Civil Service – Memoirs

Former senior Civil Servants Sir Antony Part and Roy Denman have both published memoirs of their time in Whitehall (post war through to the 1970s). Clive Ponting, infamous for his role in leaking papers concerning the sinking of the Belgrano, has written several books. Christopher Meyer (former Ambassador to the United States) and Sherard Cowper-Coles (former diplomat) have written more recent memoirs, primarily relevant to Blair's time in office.

Roy Denman points to the natural tension at the heart of the relationship (2002, p.23), and his anecdotes about a resistance to interchange with the private sector (ibid, p.26), and the constrictions of hierarchy (ibid, p.42), suggest that these ongoing concerns have a historical root. The Ministerial qualities he admired in Harold Wilson were his intellect, humour and geniality (ibid, p.28). The qualities he admired most in fellow Civil Servants were authority, clarity and courage – all to be found shining through in their advice to Ministers (ibid, p.49). His own position became near impossible given his distaste for the Labour administration of the 1970s (ibid, p.157), his own role in negotiating entry into Europe and his own passion for the previous Government's policy.

Antony Part rejects the contention that change is anathema for Senior Civil Servants – for him they exist to help enable it (1990, p.107). His extremely difficult relationship with Tony Benn appeared doomed from the start (ibid, p.169). Benn felt Part and his Department had a clear agenda and that his Permanent Secretary did not respect him (see Benn, 1996, p.287 & p.294). Part felt that his Minister deliberately created an atmosphere of hostility, was politically isolated and was pursuing an impossible policy (Part, 1990, p.172). Kaufman considers in these circumstances, the Minister will always be ultimately to blame for not carrying his Civil Servants (1997, Pp.32-33).

Clive Ponting, writing in 1989, considered that the biggest problem for Whitehall was that it was operating a nineteenth century model, which had not been adapted to fit the modern world (Ponting, 1989). Ponting condemns the notion of ministerial responsibility, developed at a time when departments contained a handful of officials, as a "meaningless charade" (ibid, p.10). Ponting criticises the structure of Whitehall and its personnel – and suggests the establishment of small, policy focused departments (with administration being separated out). He is critical of Whitehall's "cosy, club-like spirit…" (ibid, p.37) and suggests that the cult of the elitist, intellectual, amateur and the out-dated notion of political impartiality is no longer either desirable or tenable (ibid, p. 47). Twenty-seven years after Ponting called for fundamental and strategic reform of Whitehall – encompassing ministerial-civil service relations – no such exercise has taken place.

Meyer and Cowper-Coles's insights are both centred on the New Labour years. Meyer's reflections are more universal. He highlights the importance of Ministers saying thanks and being strong whilst also believing that they are inthrall to the press (Meyer, 2006, p.35). For him good ministerial qualities are intuition, political skill, frankness and grasp of policy detail (ibid, Pp. 77-8). Negative ministerial qualities include hesitancy, quietness and defensiveness (ibid, p.78-9). By implication, he also thinks that relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants will be much harder to forge when a new Government is elected after long years in opposition (ibid, p.78).

Cowper-Coles's reflections come from his every day interaction with Robin Cook – so complement Meyer's neatly. Early in his career he understood that Civil Servants must adjust for the political demands on their Minister (Cowper-Coles, 2013, p.15), and whilst working with Cook he achieved a successful relationship by understanding his Minister's needs and then adapting to them (ibid, Pp 201-4). He was supportive, but also found ways to ensure his Minister got through the mundane but essential every day work. Two beautifully simple examples show the importance of personal chemistry in all relationships. The first where Cook did not get on with someone who constantly smelled of cigarettes (ibid, p. 206); the second where Cook perceived that his Permanent Secretary did not approve of him – especially as they were cut from similar cloth (ibid, Pp 211-12). Cook's disquiet at a candidate for Permanent Secretary who he didn't consider would be tough enough with him is also revealing (Pp. 228-9). Cowper-Coles also provides an impassioned warning about the importance of unvarnished advice (ibid, p.299).

The overall vision these insights create is complex and nuanced – no abiding themes emerge in the way that they do from the Ministerial literature. Denman confirms some of the historically perceived issues with the Civil Service (insular, hierarchical) whilst Part rejects others (change averse). Ponting's criticisms are strategic ones; and many of the issues he highlights are still relevant. The limitations in the weight of the material also means drawing general conclusions is dangerous – especially given the snapshots of distinct periods of time, uneven in length.

Civil Service –Training material and academic papers

There are a limited range of sources that I have also considered which are focused on the job of the Civil Servant, and how Civil Servants can work with Ministers more effectively. Jary (2008, p.5) notes that the relationship between Ministers and Civil Servants is symbiotic. Ministers bring democratic legitimacy and accountability, political direction and a common sense approach to government. Civil Servants bring expertise, specialism, objectivity and continuity. In terms of what one group wants from the other he believes that Ministers want: practical advice about using the government machine; clear, objective and expert advice in line with their aims; early warning of problems; and efficient and loyal implementation of decisions. Civil Servants want: accessibility and readiness to listen; clear direction and feedback; decisiveness and consistency; and fluent and persuasive articulation of policy to the public (ibid, p.14). The similarity with the classic Haldaneian view summarised in Chapter One is clear.

Marshall's handbook (2010) advises Ministers to understand the perspective of officials if they want to get the best from them. He urges simple planning, diary keeping, and ruthless prioritisation: "If you have more than three priorities, you're deluding yourself. That's called a shopping list" (ibid, p.9). He emphasises the importance of investing in human relationships (ibid, p.25-28) and the need for reflection – with Ministers needing to ensure that the urgent does not always triumph over the important (Pp. 35-6). Marshall's guide exposes some of the seemingly intractable issues that governing presents, at times in stark terms. It received some negative press coverage (Brady, 2011).

Grant and Jary (2010) contend that senior Civil Servants are often strong intellectually and analytically but emotionally shy and lacking in people skills. They think that this in turn has shaped a Civil Service "that is much more comfortable with theory, process, analysis and

control than with practical action and decision, leadership and management and simple human communication[15]." (Grant & Jary, 2010, p.96).

Whilst this might not be revelatory in itself, they go on to cite statistical evidence to suggest that the stereotype is valid. The results of a recent sample of senior Civil Servants undertaking the Myers Briggs analysis of styles are:

> "…71% shared two out of four characteristics (out of a possible sixteen) and 65% shared three out of four. Nine of the sixteen characteristics were unrepresented within the group. Julian Rizzello…(NSG psychologist)…regards this as a typical sample. His long experience suggests that between 50% and 75% of senior Civil Servants fall into a few closely related types of the sixteen identified by Myers-Briggs. This is a large enough cadre to maintain a dominant culture." (ibid, p.96).

Grant and Jary's contention appears to be that the culture demands a certain type of person; and that type of person demands a certain culture.

[15] It is worth briefly cross referring to Rhodes' insights into Civil Service language here: "…preferences for politeness, understatement, distance and detachment pervade the everyday phrases used by the Civil Service. They are examples of the way in which the Civil Service takes the emotion out of everyday life." (Rhodes, 2011, p.191). He goes on to criticise a passage in a working with Ministers booklet, authored by Chris Jary, which lists jargon words to be avoided. Rhodes is rather disappointed that the terminology, which he considers represents "…the everyday language of managerialism" (ibid, p.203) is subjected to this treatment. He considers the mere fact that such a list was published indicates that the Cabinet Office were undermining management reform. I do not agree with the implication Rhodes draws here (as I have argued in Chapter One). Rhodes' own academic standpoint, as briefly discussed in the next sub-title, is important context when considering these remarks.

Academic Literature

Academic research does not corroborate some of the dominant, negative themes that emerge concerning Civil Servants from the Ministerial perspective. Two of the major academic contributors in recent years are Rhodes and Richards. Rhodes is interpretivist in his approach. Richards is more traditional; a critical realist/empiricist who considers political theory to be important. There are two dominant governance models that underpin Rhodes' and Richards' views. Rhodes is the co-creator of the differentiated polity model (see Rhodes, 1994; Bevir & Rhodes, 2008) – which suggests that the state is being hollowed out and power exchange relationships are now dispersed between a large number of actors. Richards is the co-creator of the asymmetric polity model (Marsh, Richards and Smith, 2003) – which suggests that the dispersal of power from the centre can be overemphasised and unequal power relationships at the heart of Government are still extremely important.

Rhodes (2011) was embedded within a Department, which allowed him to conduct an ethnographic study and gain rare access to Ministers and Civil Servants interacting daily. Rhodes notes that Civil Servants are cautious for good reason, and that this caution will often be misinterpreted – understandably – by a keen Minister (2011, p.128-9). He found the Civil Servants he observed tended be hard working (ibid, p.272), loyal (ibid, p.13) and found no evidence that they tried to undermine Ministers (ibid, p.185). Rhodes' conclusions are particularly interesting. Despite his clear view that the Westminster model is a flawed theoretical construct, he acknowledges that "Westminster beliefs…remain core beliefs for *both* Ministers and permanent secretaries and help to shape their actions" Original emphasis (Rhodes, 2011, p.284). Rhodes highlights the importance of stories and mythology, and was surprised that:

> "As I watched ministers and civil servants enact their everyday stories, I saw them re-enacting the nineteenth century constitution." (ibid, p.280).

His ethnographic research leads Rhodes to an interesting place. In essence the models and belief systems which he considers are outdated and lack relevance are the very models that he finds those within Government still base their actions and relationships on. As an interpretivist, he deserves credit for drawing this conclusion, which must have been an uncomfortable one for him to derive.

Richards' research suggests that power was rebalanced by the Conservatives from Civil Servants to Ministers (1997) – and further by New Labour towards the Prime Minister (2008). There was a personalisation rather than overt politicisation of the Civil Service under the Conservatives (1997, Pp 133-151), but this eroded the objectivity of the advice being provided (ibid, p245). Under New Labour, "joined-up" Government was intended to be the strategic solution to an age old Whitehall problem: feudalism (2008, Pp. 124-129). However, "game playing" ensued (ibid, p.126), some individual Ministers felt undermined, and I suspect that relationships between those Ministers and their Civil Servants became much more difficult as a result. Diamond (2014), writing after the conclusion of the complete Labour term in office, concurs with Richards in broad terms that New Labour operated within the bounds of the existing model. He also avers that they lacked the requisite constitutional knowledge and strategic vision to substantially redraw its boundaries, despite having a clear opportunity to do so (ibid, p. 286).

Page and Jenkins (2005) conducted a number of in depth interviews with Civil Servants. They found that junior officials may often be blamed by Ministers initially (2005, p.162), but that many Civil Servants are of a high quality and demonstrate creativity and vision (ibid, p.145). As with Rhodes they find no evidence of Civil Servants trying to undermine Ministers (ibid, p.133; p.170).

New Public Management

In Chapter One, I set out the overarching principles of NPM, with reference to the work of Hood (1991), Massey & Pyper (2005), and Osborne (2010). I also considered material by Burnham and Horton (2013) concerning principal agent relations, and the works of Ferlie et al (2007), Deleon (2007) and Lynn (2010) on the discrete issue of accountability. In addition, I have also considered some of the extensive literature which considers how NPM may have changed relationships between politicians and officials.

Pollitt & Bouckhaert (2004) consider the validity of the NPM vision of the Ministerial role (as strategists and opinion leaders – who communicate values and commit resources – but who are not responsible for operations or management). In their view, "…there is little evidence that this is a credible vision of any likely reality" (ibid, p.150). They suggest that most ministers have little interest in management reforms, that incentives are still short

term, and that the pressures on politicians mean that they want to be able to "…intervene dramatically when things appear to be going wrong…" (ibid, p.150). The new models developed do not properly account for political incentives, and to pretend that managerial reform is an apolitical process is a fallacy. The public will continue to hold politicians accountable, and boundaries concerning responsibility can be shifted accordingly (with policy weakness being presented as managerial failure) (ibid, Pp. 156-157). The dissonance between the rhetoric and the reality is unlikely to make relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants, trying to deal with the dynamics above, any easier.

Hughes (1998), a supporter of NPM, acknowledges that politics are critical to managerialism – which corroborates the views I set out in Chapter One about the political motivations bound up in Thatcher's approach. Massey and Pyper (2005) note that "…the role and purpose of the central civil service is increasingly under scrutiny" (ibid, p.177), with delivery functions increasingly out-sourced, but its role providing policy advice threatened by the rise of special advisors in particular. The political element of NPM and its successor reforms seems clear, and is intertwined with some of the other societal and contextual pressures building on relationships between Ministers and officials which I examined in Chapter One.

Campbell and Wilson (1995) consider that Whitehall was fundamentally altered by NPM. They specify six examples of change that they cannot see being reversed: (i) the breaking of the monopoly of the civil service as policy advisors; (ii) alterations in the architecture of Whitehall which allowed departmental advice to be challenged by the centre; (iii) generational socialisation of officials into a culture of subordination; (iv) the view that the civil service is no longer a bespoke 'profession'; (v) increasing interaction with Europe affecting attitudes; and (vi) the rise of the career politician who is more concerned with making his or her mark than providing steady leadership (ibid, Pp. 294 – 298). Many of their points seem to chime with more recent arguments advanced concerning the challenges to the traditional model (as I explored in Chapter One).

Page (2010) suggests that of all the changes that have affected the Civil Service in recent years, the rise of managerialism has been the most significant. In his view, "It is as holders of political power that the most significant erosion has taken place" (ibid, p.421). The diminishment of the Senior Civil Service's role in policy terms, has not been replaced by a significant role as managers of delivery (as this has largely been outsourced). They are

confined to managers of policy development within departments, but should consider playing a greater involvement in that development themselves in an effort to reassert their traditional role and improve policy.

Hood & Dixon (2015) set out a detailed analysis of NPM, and have identified and created datasets in an attempt to ascertain whether Government has worked better and cost less in recent years in the UK. They conclude that "…far from falling, running costs rose substantially in absolute terms over thirty years, while complaints soared" (ibid, p.178). They question orthodox public management principles as a result but fall some distance short of endorsing the views of anti-managerialists. Their conclusions are striking in their moderation, as they acknowledge:

> "…the data examined here broadly seems to point to a more middle-of-the-road conclusion that UK central government 'cost a bit more and worked a bit worse' over the thirty years considered here. That conclusion is strikingly at odds both with the heavy drumbeat of political and managerial rhetoric surrounding successive makeovers of central government and with the common academic view that NPM and many of the changes that went along with it had major consequences…" (ibid, p.183).

Hood and Dixon make some interesting observations about the potential futility of just 'trying harder' (ibid, p.195) to repeat reforms, given the extremely limited evidence of success. If relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants have altered over recent years, it is far from clear that there has been any quantifiable benefit as a result.

Conclusion

The majority of the material I elicited from ministerial diaries and memoirs concerning relationships with Civil Servants fell into two broadly identifiable areas: control and competence. Both were seen as predominantly negative influences on relationships with Ministers.

The control theme was most clearly evident in pre-1980s literature. The perception that Thatcher formed of the Civil Service when she first became Prime Minister is consistent with the views of contemporary diarists, such as Benn and Crossman. The perception that Civil Servants were change averse and sought control appears to have been common at that time, across radically different parts of the political spectrum.

The competency theme could be identified more easily in the sample of post Thatcherite material I read. Whilst it is hard to draw any firm conclusions from this, it would appear to be consistent with the changes that took place in the 1980s under the Thatcher administration (as explored in Chapter One). Ministerial concerns may have shifted from the power their Civil Servants held, to their delivery and managerial skills.

Collectively, the thematic consistency I identified in ministerial memoirs and diaries might point to the existence of an established narrative concerning the Civil Service. The Civil Service's limited ability to adapt and change, as recorded by Ministers, points to a serious difficulty. This emerges despite the extreme subjectivity of the source material.

Civil Service material is limited for obvious reasons. Ponting's (1989) observation about the distance between the official position and the reality is consistent with the argument I have made in Chapter One. Grant and Jary (2010) suggest that personal typology is an important factor in deciding who climbs to senior civil service positions – and the culture that may subsequently endure. If their contention is correct, it may offer an additional explanation as to the consistency of the themes identified in the ministerial literature.

From the academic perspective, material focused directly on relationships is rare. Rhodes (2011), Richards (1997; 2008) and Diamond (2014) find that a traditional conception of the state and constitution still frames the actions of those in Government – despite the changes to the relationship that have taken place in recent decades. Pollitt & Bouckhaert (2004),

Hughes (1998), Massey & Pyper (2005), Campbell & Wilson (1995) and Page (2010) show how NPM and the rise of managerialism have affected the role of the Civil Service and challenged Westminster model orthodoxy. Hood & Dixon (2015) find that the efficiency and 'quality' of Government has not changed significantly in recent years despite the changes that have taken place.

Despite the variety of the existing source material, some important conclusions can still be drawn. Ministerial concerns about the Civil Service have persisted over time. The formal constitutional position has been challenged but prevails. NPM has changed the informal role of Civil Servants and is likely to have affected relationships with Ministers as a consequence. These conclusions align with my findings in Chapter One and my focus on personal, individual relationships. Arguably, it makes it even more important for these relationships to be better understood and optimised, especially given the apparent difficulties with systemic reform. Having reviewed the relevant literature, I wanted to generate new and discrete insights to test and supplement the existing material, focused clearly on optimising relationships. In the next Chapter, I set out my primary research methodology for doing so.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My role

In this Chapter I set out the methodological approach taken in this research. Before doing so it is worth noting that I do not fulfil the traditional role of external, disinterested researcher. I am a Senior Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Justice. I have been a civil servant since 2002. My current grade is Senior Executive Officer (a junior management role). I have worked for Labour, Coalition, and Conservative administrations (serving Ministers from all three parties). The frequency of my contact with Ministers has varied depending on the preferences of the Ministerial team, and the exact positions I have held. I have always worked in a policy environment, so I am familiar with the types of issues that Ministers and Civil Servants have to deal with. My own experiences are not the subject of my work. That would be completely inappropriate. There is no reference to them throughout this piece. The idea for the work was my own; all the research was conducted unaided, and the final piece reflects my own personal views. It has been produced purely in my capacity as a doctoral candidate.

However, it is inevitable that my own role has affected my perceptions, created inherent biases and informed my approach. My own role is both a potential strength and weakness. The knowledge underpinning the subject area, the perceived credibility of the work, and the potential for actual change to result are highlighted as possible strengths of insider – research. Weaknesses may include a perceived lack of impartiality, vested interests in reaching certain conclusions, and an unwillingness or inability to analyse data generated from a fresh perspective (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010, Pp 6-7). I consider my intrinsic understanding of certain scenarios Ministers have to deal with could be perceived as a potential strength of this work.

My “agency” as a practitioner (ibid, p.116) may have affected the way I perceive and construct relationships within government, the theoretical underpinning to my work, and my decision to focus on optimising individual relationships within the existing framework (as set out in Chapter One). That could be perceived as a potential weakness in the work. As set out by Soobrayan (2003), researchers themselves are often the main research tool. Dealing with the small “p” political implications of research is a process of judgement – my views as to the motivations of my interviewees and their aims are important to the way

that I have weighed and presented their views. As set out below, my overall judgement is that my interviewees genuinely wanted to help improve practice.

Contrary to what might be expected, I do not consider that my own role helped me secure access to any former Ministers. As explained below, I wrote a number of letters to former Ministers with whom I had no connection at all. I do consider that my role may have persuaded potential interviewees to accept my invitations, and may have persuaded them to agree to be cited by name. That, in itself, may say something about their attitude to the Civil Service in turn (i.e. that they intrinsically trusted me, as a Civil Servant, to deal responsibly with the results and to characterise their views fairly – despite the fact I was engaging with them in my capacity as a research student). My role also underlies my belief that the work could have potential utility for Ministers and Civil Servants; and that there are deficiencies in the existing material which considers the human interaction at the heart of government (see Chapter Two). Those who read this work will be able to draw their own conclusions about its potential value, in this light.

Overarching methodological approach

The overarching methodological approach I have adopted is considered below. There are several different methodological approaches to analysing British Government. Richards and Smith (2004) suggest that there are four main ways to analyse the relationship: the constitutional approach, rational choice theory, materialist, and interpretative.

The constitutional approach is the classic lens through which interaction has been understood. It emphasises conventions, behaviours, and the gradual evolution of traditional 'club' rules – some of which are now codified principles. This approach is based on ageing Westminster precepts that appear to endure, as explored in Chapters One and Two.

Rational choice theory provides a stark alternative – focusing on the motivation of Ministers and Civil Servants. The central contention is that rational self-interest drives behaviours. Ministers want re-election and political progression. Officials are utility maximizers looking for increased budgets, or to reduce the "costs" to themselves of transactions with Ministers, by reshaping their environment to suit their own needs (Dowding & James, 2004). I argue in Chapter One that Thatcher saw the underlying

motivation of Civil Servants through the prism of rational choice, and this drove many of the changes to the relationship that she subsequently imposed (see Smith, 2015, p.73).

The materialist approach suggests that central state intervention in the economy or society was not seen as desirable or necessary as a result of the way Britain developed from the Victorian era onwards (Richards and Smith, 2004, p.779). The argument is that this drove the emphasis on generalists in the civil service, rather than specialists – with the need to serve their Minister, rather than the state as a whole, also featuring.

Finally, the most recently developed approach is an interpretive one. This has been developed principally by Bevir and Rhodes (2004) in relation to political science. It considers that to understand the actions of individuals, it is necessary to understand the traditions and beliefs that underpin them. Richards and Smith (2004) argue that the principal belief and tradition applicable to British government is the Westminster model. And, as explored in Chapter Two, Rhodes (2011) himself reaches a very similar conclusion in a later work, based on embedded, ethnographic research

There are strengths in the rational choice and materialist approach. I deal directly with one rational choice argument put to me by my interviewees (see Chapter Six) concerning the motivation behind portrayals of the relationship. Some of the results of my primary research could be seen as validating a materialist approach to analysing the role of Ministers and Civil Servants. For example, elements of Chapter Seven focus on the Civil Service's lack of specialist skills and loyalty to individual Ministers over the Government as a whole. As Richards and Smith (2004) identify, the interpretative approach is useful for understanding why slightly different versions of the Westminster model may have evolved, from the perspectives of Ministers as compared to Civil Servants. However, my assessment is that the Westminster model remains the most important frame for understanding relationships between Ministers and officials. In my view, the interpretative approach ends up yielding stories, beliefs and descriptions which add richness and nuance to the overarching Westminster narrative. But, as Rhodes (2011) found, these stories end up corroborating the Westminster model's primacy. For this reason, I have adopted the constitutional approach, with the Westminster model and Haldane as the theoretical framework for my investigation.

Primary research methods

At the end of Chapter Two, I concluded that the existing literature concerning relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants has some deficiencies. I wanted to generate more sophisticated and detailed findings through primary research, in concert with my focus on individual relationships. I decided to approach former UK Government Ministers to elicit their perceptions about relationships with Civil Servants. I had explored the Civil Servants' perspective in related, smaller scale research, but felt that the ministerial perspective was most important, given the asymmetric power relationships between the two groups.

I briefly considered a "scoping" stage to the research – where I would send out a combined invitation along with a Likert scaling or semantic differential survey to potential participants. I did not proceed with this as metric data would not have yielded the type of nuanced insights that the literature had generally lacked.

I decided to conduct semi structured, extended, qualitative interviews given my focus (relationships) and my desire to generate rich data. Cresswell (2003, Pp.21-22) states that a qualitative approach may be best when there is little existing research about a problem and it needs to be understood. I had broad areas I wished to investigate on the basis of the insights into the relationship that I have already set out. I also wanted to allow my interviewees scope to explore areas that they wished to when considering the relationship. I opted to request in-depth personal interviews, rather than a group discussion or a Delphi study. I wanted to hear examples and stories of human relationships rather than facilitate formal group discussions – where participants moderated or compromised their views in order to reach a collective conclusion.

I decided that in order to ensure the objectivity of my work that I would exclude all Ministers in the coalition administration from the scope of my studies. I would also exclude all Ministers that I had worked with during my time in the civil service. I decided to limit my potential pool of interviewees to the Thatcher, Major, Brown and Blair administrations. In addition, I excluded Ministers who had only served in the first Thatcher administration. This meant I was considering the period 1983 to 2010. It meant as equitable a chronological balance as I could achieve between Conservative and Labour administrations (14 years of the former; 13 years of the latter) and encompassed three successive outright election

victories for both parties (1983, 1987, and 1992 for the Conservatives and 1997, 2001, and 2005 for Labour).

I used each election as a basis for the construction of my potential sample. Reliable source data concerning the occupation of each Ministerial post in Government exists for each of these years in the Times Guide to the House of Commons (published after each election). This allowed for the potential stratification of my sample and a longitudinal analysis (for example I might be able to examine whether perceptions had shifted over time)[16]. I generated a list for each year that included the three great Departments of State (Treasury, Home Office, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office). These three departments have been largely immune from the machinery of government changes that regularly re-draw the map of Whitehall. In addition to these departments I also selected two other Departments that have existed in various incarnations from 1983 to 2010 (Health and Environment). These departments have altered in size and scope over the years – but have retained their fundamental responsibilities with respect to health and environment at least.

I generated a list of all Ministers in these Departments, in the governments formed after each election. The completed list provided a "snap-shot" of the occupants of all Ministerial jobs in my selected Departments at six fixed moments in time (the first post-election ministerial cadres of 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, and 2005).

Establishing contact details, interview requests and response

Having generated this list, I then tried to find contact details for each of the people I had identified. I used the UK Parliament website as my principal source. A small number of former ministers had sadly died. Many more of the former ministers on my lists were sitting in the House of Lords. I was able to establish contact details for around 100 of the Ministers I identified. I wrote to these former Ministers, explaining my role, the purpose of my research, and asking for an interview.

In excess of one in three (35%) of former Ministers I wrote to agreed to be interviewed. This exceeded my expectations. I declined the last few Ministers who wrote back to me, because I decided to cap my sample at twenty-five interviews (for a table of interviewees

[16] In actual fact, when analysing my primary research, given the nature of the insights I gathered and my sample size, I decided not to attempt to stratify the results longitudinally or against any other fixed variable.

see Appendix II). I did not believe I had the time or resources to conduct or analyse any further interviews. Some of those I spoke to told me that they never agreed to do interviews but they had made an exception given the importance which they attached to the issue. Each took around an hour out of their schedules, some considerably longer, and I paid no fees.

Ethics

I have abided by Chester's statement of principles in regard to my research. I have considered the established ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence and justice (Childress, Meslin, Shapiro, 2005). I explained to my interview participants who I was, what my intentions were in conducting the interviews and what I intended to do with the results. I clarified that the purpose of the research is to maximise the effectiveness of future working between Ministers and Civil Servants for the mutual benefit of both. In terms of justice, there is no intention in my work to suggest changes to the system which might negatively affect either party. As set out below, my participants provided clearance for me to use the quotations I selected in my work (see Appendix III).

Interviews

The interviews took place between August 2012 and November 2012. Most of them were conducted "in person", with some taking place over the phone. I recorded and transcribed each interview and subsequently sent a transcript back to each participant for their approval.

Organisation & Presentation of findings

I codified my interview transcripts manually, having considered the use of *Nvivo* software to achieve this. My decision was based on the importance of capturing the overall message I considered my interviewees were providing and being able to split this flexibly, iteratively and gradually into themes that emerged as I analysed the scripts. Personally, manual codification of printed transcripts was the method that allowed me to achieve this most effectively.

All responses may have been subject to bias, but there is no independent means of verification. In one sense this does not matter as I am concerned with perceptions rather than objective social reality. It is also the case that the respondents were all genuinely concerned with the research topic rather than attempting to self-justify. To ensure consistency I asked essentially the same set of questions to each interviewee which provided me with a firm base for comparing and weighting the comments made. There is also a reflexive element to the analysis and presentation of my findings in the next four Chapters. The words of the Ministers I spoke to dominate, but I have interwoven references with my analysis where I consider the views emerging challenge or corroborate the existing literature. This approach aims to maximise the strength and richness of my findings.

This codification and analysis has led me to present the different themes that emerged over the next four chapters (all drawn from the views of my Ministerial interviewees). Chapter Four deals with potential positive and negative influences on individual relationships from the Ministerial perspective. Chapter Five deals with influences from the Civil Service perspective. Chapter Six deals with the apparent disparity between the views of my ministerial interviewees, and the views in the ministerial literature, about Civil Service behaviours. And Chapter Seven deals with systemic issues.

CHAPTER FOUR - POTENTIAL POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES ON RELATIONSHIPS – MINISTERS

Having set out my methodology, in Chapter Four I consider potential positive and negative influences on relationships with Civil Servants, from the Ministerial perspective. I have summarised in bullet form the traits and behaviours that my interviewees perceived that *Ministers* should display which might positively and negatively influence relationships with their Civil Servants. It is also worth noting that some of the factors considered are contextual ones beyond Ministerial control (e.g. whether they are Cabinet or Junior Ministers).

POSITIVE INFLUENCES

- Those who show leadership, direction and set clear expectations
- Those who understand the importance of the embryonic relationship
- Those who have energy and charisma, even though they may overstep their bounds
- Those who treat their Civil Servants with respect
- Those who are able and are perceived to be so by their Civil Servants
- Those who challenge their Civil Servants
- Those who carry their Civil Servants even when making wholly political decisions

Those who show leadership, direction and set clear expectations

Paul Goggins told me that leadership was the single most important ministerial quality. This was critical to good relationships with Civil Servants and for their own effectiveness:

> "Civil servants rightly expect Ministers to take a lead. If Ministers just let civil servants take the lead then the machine doesn't go very fast. It does enough to keep things safe, but nothing really changes; it just chugs on."

John Denham neatly summarised the spectrum of traits that Ministers may possess and the reaction these traits are likely to provoke from their Civil Servants:

> "…there are ministers who are stupid, there are ministers who bully, there are ministers who are capricious, and there are ministers who don't know what they

> want to do. There are also ministers who are visionary, focused, have very clear ideas, and are able to set priorities. I think that civil servants as a whole, including the senior leadership, respond well or overwhelmingly (well) to the latter type of minister and badly to the first lot."

Ben Bradshaw, in reflecting on some variation in the performance of his Civil Servants highlighted leadership as critical, not least from their political masters:

> "That often depended on the leadership within that department and the quality of that leadership, and also the leadership provided by the Ministers and Secretaries of State actually which is often overlooked. They have an important role setting out the priorities and being clear as to what they want to achieve..."

Very similar views were advanced by a significant number of my interviewees (John Denham, John Healey, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Lord Moore, Baroness Armstrong, Lord Cope and Lord Blencathra). The strongest single point to emerge from my interviewees was the critical importance of Ministerial leadership to the relationship. The perceived importance of leadership is also consistent with the Westminster model – and the narrative that Richards and Smith (2004) contend that Ministers appeal to within it. This is their "historical impact" on policy and politics (ibid, Pp 787-790) and their ability to shape events almost regardless of the context. The consistency of the message about the importance of leadership indicates that my interviewees thought the key variable in the whole relationship was not Civil Service behaviour, outside events, or political context – but simply the strength and ability of the Minister in question. From this perspective it corroborates much of the extant literature.

Those who understand the importance of the embryonic relationship

The early stages of any relationship can be crucial, and those between Ministers and Civil Servants are no exception. Lord Cope made an important point about the initial attitude of Ministers towards their Civil Servants:

> "Some Ministers make the mistake of starting to regard them (Civil Servants) as their enemies and that is a major error, because it's not true and secondly because it's not the way to get the best out of them."

Lord Blencathra (formerly David Maclean MP) shared the story of his move to the Department of Environment following the 1992 election – where Michael Howard was to be his Secretary of State. Howard rang him and told him about a routine meeting, and told him not to worry about travelling to attend. Then his new private secretary called him:

> "'Mr Maclean, there is a very important meeting tomorrow, (it's) absolutely vital you get to the department.'
> I said 'Oh I can't be bothered.'
> 'What?!'
> 'Tell old Howard I'm too busy. I've other things to do. I'll see him on Monday.'
> 'But minister, it's vital...'
> 'Don't worry, we'll just take it as it comes on Monday.'
>
> That was me being mischievous and also making a kind of point, for the life of me I'm not sure what the point is, but I made that point."

When he arrived at the Department Lord Blencathra told his Private Office staff that he wanted to spend the first day with them, he did not want to meet the Permanent Secretary, and he did not want to look at any briefs. The point that Lord Blencathra made, but could not identify, was - I think - that he was going to be a strong Minister who led his officials, and he was going to do things his way. He was mischievous, but he was setting the parameters of the relationship immediately. By then refusing to see anyone but his Private Office staff on his first visit to the Department he implied that his relationship with them was of more importance than anything else. He had sent them the message that he was his own man, and that they were more critical to him than the Permanent Secretary, or the government brief for which he was now responsible. With this simple act he had probably engendered loyalty, admiration and a stock of good will that I suspect carried him through his entire time in office. There is a connection with Haldane here: Lord Blencathra was demonstrating, through his actions, that he intended to work in close partnership with his officials.

Those who have energy and charisma, even though they may overstep their bounds

Lord Moore also provided an example which shows just how important the individual charisma and energy of a politician is to their relationships with Civil Servants. In the scenario he talks about, Lord Moore was perilously close to entering territory that is seen as the preserve of the Civil Service – i.e. its structure. He realised that winning the intellectual and public debate about privatisation was absolutely key, and he also realised that Treasury officials were the ideal resource he needed to deploy to help him achieve his goal. He spoke to one of his officials:

> '"Well privatisation... You know the state shouldn't be over it. We all know that, but that isn't the feeling in the outside world. I want to change the colour of the water in which the fish swim. I want to create a team of people to help me articulate the case."'

Lord Moore took a calculated gamble in having this conversation. Not only did he persuade those in the Treasury to help him refine and articulate his argument, at a quite philosophical level, but he also got the Department to specifically allocate people and time to enable this. I suspect he was successful in this endeavour because of his sheer enthusiasm, dynamism and charisma[17].

In Chapters One and Two I considered the challenges to the Westminster model and Haldane. The deliberative space Lord Moore carved out for himself here is arguably larger than anything envisaged by Haldane, and the task he set was the creation and articulation of policy. The example is drawn from a time when the changes to the broader relationship under Thatcher were still in their infancy.

Other Ministers who have tried to take the same approach have been rebuked for operating outside of long established rules and conventions (I cite the example of an anonymised Minister later in this Chapter). Personal chemistry and charisma appears essential to whether a Minister can cross the Rubicon and achieve their goals without irretrievably damaging their relationships with officials. But trust, loyalty and co-

[17] Michael Heseltine is another Minister who was seen to overstep traditional boundaries, but tended to succeed because, in the words of Lord Hennessy (1990, p. 607) he was a Whitehall 'freak' who was '…fascinated by the machine' (ibid).

dependence are fundamental here too. Baroness Armstrong also told me about changes to Civil Service structure that she made during her last year in post. It seems she succeeded as a result of a strong relationship with the Cabinet Secretary. In both scenarios, the end seemed more important than the methods used to achieve it. They succeeded in these examples, but may have run into much starker internal opposition had they been politicians of lesser calibre.

Those who treat their Civil Servants with respect

Lord Knight articulated a prosaic truth about the way in which Ministers can ensure that Civil Servants produce their best:

> "I was of the view, that not all Ministers stick by, that you're much better off having them on your side than shouting at them and bullying them and in the end getting them working for you because they have to."

Baroness Cumberlege's thoughts on the matter also suggest that a Minister who regularly loses their composure might in turn lose some of their authority:

> "I just have never felt that losing your temper gets you anywhere. I can be pretty tough, but I wouldn't ever do it by raising my voice."

Paul Goggins, Baroness Armstrong, Lord Triesman and Lord Luce all made very similar points. Lord Bradley stressed how important it was to form good relationships with private office staff. He told me that confidentiality was critical to the relationship, and both sides needed to ensure that this was treated as sacrosanct:

> "You can have huge disagreements but your public face must be at one. Again I chair a hospital - if my chief executive and I have huge disagreements, they're behind closed doors and we work them through, our public face is one of absolute unity, not a cigarette paper between us."

Fiona Mactaggart considered that her personal style might have affected her interaction with her Civil Servants:

> "I'm not a very measured person and I think civil servants sometimes found that odd… I would be unmeasured, I would be extreme, I would use extreme language, I would thump tables occasionally and things like that which I think is relatively rare behaviour in junior ministers."

It appears from the extracts above that Ministers who are temperate and respectful when interacting with their Civil Servants are more likely to get the best performance from them. This statement seems so glaringly obvious as to be a truism. Paradoxically, it is this which makes it particularly interesting from a research perspective. The diaries of Benn (1996), Crossman (1979), Blunkett (2006) and Clark (1993) all contain examples of them losing their temper with their Civil Servants to no great effect. Rawnsley (2010) alleges that former Prime Minister Gordon Brown would lose his temper with Civil Servants at Number Ten, some of whom were junior members of staff. The phenomenon is not new, nor is it unexpected. However, I suspect the pains my interviewees went to in mentioning it might speak to its increasing frequency. Lord Knight and Lord Bradley's examples also suggest that relationships may be positively influenced when Ministers make sure there is a safe, private space for discussion in line with a traditional view of the Westminster model.

Those who are able and are perceived to be so by their Civil Servants

Paul Goggins told me that Civil Servants ask a number of questions concerning the skills of new Ministers, and the answers to these questions will affect the nature of their interaction:

> "They will make a judgement call very quickly on a Minister… 'are they prepared to learn, do they work hard, do they care about what they're doing, do they have a clue about what they're doing, do they have the judgement?'"

Lord Waldegrave eloquently captured his own vision of Ministerial character and flair:

> "The sort of people who go into politics are rather like the sort of people who go into being actors. They're applause seekers, they are extroverts. That's inevitable: the Greeks knew that if you didn't want those kind of people, you'd have to draw lots, but if you had elections you'd have people who are good at winning elections."

It is of course many of these qualities that allow them to succeed politically, not least on the floor of the House, and in persuading their colleagues of the utility and appeal of their policies and ideas. Rather than resent these qualities, most Civil Servants cherish them. Nick Raynsford, Sir Malcolm Rifkind and Lord Skelmersdale expressed similar views.

Baroness Armstrong shared an assessment that a Civil Servant, who had worked with her, and her successors, had made:

> "You weren't nearly as bright and intellectual as the two that followed…but you were a better minister because you understood what the job was and you had the ear of the Prime Minister and you could get the civil servants to really work for you."

What seems clear from these words is that Civil Servants do not long for a Minister in their own reflection.

Ministers who prove themselves to their Civil Servants are likely to inspire a better response from their officials in turn. Civil Servants will at times make a judgement about their Minister's political capital, strength and patronage. If Civil Servants have no faith that the policy they are working on will ever be realised, that may affect their dedication to it.

The above could also be seen as corroborating the academic literature which points to the complementary but ultimately consistent views that Ministers and Civil Servants have of the Westminster model and the way in which they should interact (Richards and Smith, 2004). Problems occur if one side or other departs from the 'rules of the game' or does not have the ability to fulfil their role.

Those who challenge their Civil Servants

The last two subtitles confirm that it is important for Ministers to show their Civil Servants respect, and that it is important how Civil Servants perceive their Minister. However, neither reduces the necessity for Ministers to challenge their Civil Servants. Ultimately this encourages them to raise their game, increase the rigour of their thinking and is likely to positively influence relationships in time.

John Denham told me about the reaction of one of his senior Civil Servants when he resigned over the Iraq war:

> "(He) described me as a challenging minister which I think he didn't mean as a compliment, but I always rather took as a compliment because I always found...(that) the really good people used to love working for me as minister because it was exciting, and I knew what I wanted and I fought reasonably hard for it."

Lord Blencathra felt that his Civil Servants were invigorated by the nature of his interaction with them. For his part he would not accept written advice without discussing it:

> "…very often there was an A minus or an A plus instead of just option A, B or C. Those were often good fun meetings too, to create the relationship with civil servants and then they picked up the vibes on where you're coming from on various things."

This links directly to a point I discuss in Chapter Five, concerning the importance of Civil Servants taking the time to understand their Minister's philosophy.

Fiona Mactaggart sometimes found the relationship with her Civil Servants a difficult one, as I discuss below. However, she cited one example when her passion and drive concerning an extremely traumatic subject jolted her Civil Servants out of their routine and focused their minds. Her tactics were unusual but extremely effective:

> "…when I took over the junior stuff on prisons there I noticed that the first notes in my box were all these suicides, I couldn't bear it, I just couldn't bear it, so I started saying to my team 'you have to text me when someone kills themselves'. I tell you what, it actually made people really focus, they didn't want to send the minister a text saying there's been another suicide. Actually it just ramped it up a bit and that was a moment when I realised that sometimes one of the problems of the civil service is you get into a routine, even if you're dealing with something appalling like people killing themselves."

By connecting her Civil Servants personally with each tragic event, and making them dread the act of communicating this news to the Minister, she made each death real to them. She would have dreaded the receipt of such a message as much as the Civil Servant who had to send it. Their dread and sorrow can be of nothing compared to the families involved. With this simple and unusual challenge, Fiona Mactaggart focused the minds of her staff.

Whilst none of my ministerial interviewees named the Haldane convention, the answers above show how integral they thought internal challenge was to positive relationships with their Civil Servants. In other words, they did not just want to allocate a managerial task for their Civil Servants to deliver, they wanted to probe their policy advice before acting on it.

Those who carry their Civil Servants even when making wholly political decisions

Lord Whitty highlighted the fact that occasionally Ministers have to make decisions for their own reasons:

> "I think there are points where it is necessary for a political or strategic imperative to be spelled out, and they find that quite difficult. It is different from their pre-conceptions, and sometimes I found that as well."

There is a clear tension here with the contents of the preceding sub-title. Lord Whitty's example is closer to a more "transactional" exchange, with the Minister as "principal" and his official as "agent".

Lord Moore gave a fascinating example of the importance of being able to carry your Civil Servants where you are forced to make a decision for political reasons. It poses the question 'when is the right decision not the right decision?'

For Lord Moore, the route of a proposed Channel Tunnel link through his constituency proved to be the perfect storm. He realised that issues concerning the link route had been the element of the original Bill which had scuppered the project under Labour. When he became Transport Secretary, he knew that the link had to be scrapped in order for the Tunnel to be built. He describes the moment he informed his officials:

> "I'll never forget the absolute horror on their faces and they argued very, very hard, but they were intellectually right you know. But practically I knew they knew all the Tory seats and the background. I knew that would mean we'd be into a hole in the ground… There was no... angst with them afterwards; you never had any sort of problem."

The example above is a testament to the Minister. The trust he had previously established with his Civil Servants meant that his decision was respected. He was also honest enough to admit the decision was intellectually wrong, but politically necessary. He knew that his Civil Servants appreciated the reality too[18]. The reaction of his officials – arguing their case vigorously – indicates that they had a safe deliberative space to operate in with their Minister. Lord Moore appears to have established a Haldaneian relationship with his officials, rather than one based on conflict or paranoia.

[18] Former Senior Civil Servant Roy Denman expresses a similar view on this general principle in his memoirs: "But of course while a plan might ultimately be right does not mean that it is saleable years in advance. This must be a political judgement and cannot be left to unelected officials." (Denman, 2002, p.249).

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

- Those who mediate their relationships with Civil Servants through Special Advisors
- Those who lack experience outside of politics
- Those who occupy more junior Ministerial posts
- Those who do not work cohesively with departmental Ministerial colleagues
- Those who openly criticise their Civil Servants
- Those who frequently change their mind about policy or do not think strategically

Those who mediate their relationships with Civil Servants through Special Advisors

Sir Malcolm Rifkind suggested that there was "a period of politicisation" of the service, which he conceded may have started towards the end of John Major's administration. But he thought that the rise of the special advisor had a negative impact on the relationship between Ministers and officials:

> "Civil servants don't like being obstructed by Ministers, they accept that's the constitutional propriety, but they get pissed off if somebody who has just arrived from another occupation, and is essentially a political appointee, but is not an elected Minister, has that kind of authority."

Sir Malcolm's concession that the direction of travel predated New Labour's election may suggest that any variation of the terms of the relationship is a consequence of political modernity, rather than the approach of one party or the other. It also chimes with my findings in Chapter One about the pressures that SpAds can put on relationships, as part of the wider pluralisation of policy advice.

For Lord Cope, it wasn't necessarily just an issue of authority – problems could occur if the Minister decided to use his special advisors as a comfort blanket, and mediate relationships with Civil Servants through them:

> "…it kind of insulates the Minister from the civil service to an extent and that is a danger if there's too many of them and they stick together all the time. Secondly it makes the civil service more political because they feel they've got to try and take account of the political calculations..."

Lord Cope's general point was given concrete illustration by Nick Raynsford. He explained how a Minister who attempts to cut his Civil Servants out of decisions concerning their own Department's policy will quickly mean relationships become toxic:

> "[When]…Minister X was Secretary of State…it was totally dysfunctional because he did not understand how to work with departmental civil servants. He'd fairly early on established a regime which involved direct communication between himself, and his special advisors, with Number Ten. I found myself, very early on, in conflict with him over his attempt to essentially sideline senior officials within the area that I was responsible for, and it was very uncomfortable..."

The Minister in question appears to have removed any deliberative space for his officials, bypassing their traditional role and causing significant resentment as a consequence. Mutuality still appears to be an important ingredient in the relationship between Ministers, Civil Servants and Special Advisors. Even if there is an acceptance that tri-partite relationships will increasingly define the future, they all still play different roles, and neither one of them can substitute for another without the formal and informal rules which underpin governance in Westminster unravelling completely. Deviation from the 'rules of the game' caused the Minister in question here the same sort of difficulties that the likes of Tony Benn and Michael Howard previously encountered.

Those who lack experience outside of politics

Lord Glenarthur considered that a lack of career experience outside the political realm was problematic for today's politicians:

> "(Ministers)… don't have that broader experience that most of us had thirty years ago, either in business, the law, the military, in the civil service themselves or in the diplomatic service. So I think there is a more idealistic approach by ministers…"

Lord Moore had a very similar view – having been critical of some of the policies proposed by the current political generation:

> "I didn't become a Minister until my forties... These guys doing things in their thirties it's just lack of experience, they'd all been research assistants… They'd not actually had to fire anybody, to hire people, they hadn't grown... you make mistakes in life and you learn about it."

Lord Jenkin had a similar view. Former Ministers suggested that the rise of the career politician[19] has had a profound effect on the relationship. This is particularly important when considered in tandem with the most important positive influence that my interviewees identified from the ministerial perspective – the ability to lead. If that ability and vision is grounded in ideology, with less appreciation of the practicalities, it is not surprising if the relationship is infused with increasing tension. Politicians from previous generations are critical of policies that unravel because – in their view – today's Minister lacks the external experience to always understand what is viable and what is not.

The Civil Service is criticised by my interviewees (see Chapter Seven) for the lack of external experience its constituents possess. If both Ministers and Civil Servants are less likely to have had lengthy career experience outside of Westminster and Whitehall, decision making may be collectively poorer, particularly when big infrastructure projects are concerned. Whilst Ministers are seeking external advice more often, to compensate for an apparent lack of outside experience amongst themselves and civil servants, there is no current process for doing so, nor any empirical analysis of the merits of such advice (Levitt, 2016).

Those who occupy more junior Ministerial posts

A fascinating sub-plot emerged through the course of my interviews concerning the effects of the rank held by Ministers on their relationships with officials[20]. In general terms, the more junior the Ministerial post, the more difficult and frustrating the Ministers that I

[19] The rise of the career politician is widely heralded as a hallmark of Westminster modernity (see, for example, Cowley, 2012). Barber (2014) has pointed out that whilst political leaders now tend to lack "outside" experience in career terms, they are more grounded in political experience given increasing years spent as special advisors. In my assessment, that does not equate to "real world" experience.

[20] There are three main "ranks" of Minister: Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (PuSS) is the most junior role; Minister of State (MS) is the middle ranking position and Secretary of State (SoS) is the most senior. There are of course further distinctions, based on the seniority of the Department the Minister is based in and their portfolios.

interviewed tended to find their working relationship with Civil Servants. Ben Bradshaw offered an explanation:

> "…it's often not appreciated that being a cabinet minister is a lot easier than being a junior minister because you've got a lot more support… You have to do a lot of the dogsbody work, doing debates in Westminster Hall, end of day debates in the early hours of the morning, answering all the PQs and all the letters… A lot of ministers fall by the wayside I think, not necessarily because they're not good or haven't got the potential, just because the support systems aren't there for them."

Lord Knight made a similar point – from his perspective frustration at the Civil Service is often frustration at junior ministry and the tasks it entails. Although Lord Glenarthur was extremely positive about the Civil Service, he also highlighted the fact that Ministers at a junior level do not have the same political traction as their senior colleagues, so are more beholden to their Civil Servants as a result. When I asked him what role his Civil Servants had played in his greatest achievements, he answered:

> "I think they played an enormous role. The Government is a big machine, going in a particular direction, and all that the junior ministers are going to be able to do is to put a tweak on the tiller at some particular point[21]."

In Lord Glenarthur's case, there was no frustration about his role – but his view was atypical on that point. Fiona Mactaggart - in response to the same question - told me:

> "You know when you're a PuSS you don't have very many finest hours: you're there to clean up the garbage."

There are numerous echoes in the literature I have read, for example Mullin (2010, particularly p.30); Clark (1993, particularly p.22); and Cowper-Coles (2013, p.215). The perceived frustration of junior Ministers might indicate that Civil Servants can adopt a

[21] Former Senior Civil Servant Roy Denman uses the same seafaring metaphor when reflecting on the role that the Civil Service sees itself playing: "…unless otherwise instructed they will devote their energies to the not inconsiderable task of keeping the ship humming safely along with those minor changes of course every now and again made necessary by the political winds and the tides." (Denman, 2002, p.247).

'rational choice' approach; affording more attention on their Secretary of State, who will generally have more influence on the department's overall strategy.

For the reasons above, I consider that ministerial rank has an important influence on relationships with officials. Unless a new administration takes power after years in the political wilderness, most Ministers will start at a more junior level before progressing to Secretary of State. One reason relationships with Civil Servants may be more positively influenced as a consequence is the priority and relative level of support the Civil Service give their one senior Minister, in comparison with the others. The potential solution might be to increase support to junior Ministerial posts. Another solution might be to encourage a paradigm shift in the way that junior Ministerial office is perceived.

Those who do not work cohesively with Ministerial colleagues in the same Department

Lord Whitty thought that the inter-relationships between Ministers in a Department were often overlooked. If there are splits between Ministers, this can in turn negatively influence Ministerial-Civil Servant relationships, because Civil Servants may not know which direction they need to be travelling in:

> "The DETR was a very big department, and had strong secessionist views in the transport part of it which eventually triumphed… Civil servants who were from, and of, the transport side were trying to commandeer their Ministers to take a secessionist view."

In this example, it seems that sets of Civil Servants with very different policy responsibilities and views were subsumed into one Department, which led to intradepartmental rivalries between its own Civil Servants, and between its own Ministers.

If Ministers within one Department are not united, they are also likely to suffer, because there may be times where the Civil Service uses this to its advantage. Lord Blencathra provided a colourful example by recounting the words of one of his Civil Servants:

> "Oh it was good fun here in the past because we had a Home Secretary and then we'd Ken Clarke, we'd David Mellor, and we just put a wedge between them. So if they wanted to do things and I didn't like it I would just get David Mellor to say one

thing, the Home Secretary the other and then I carried on my policy. You two buggers, you and Michael Howard, I can't put a wedge between you."

If Civil Servants feel compelled to play one Minister off against another, this speaks to failing relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants in a broader sense. Ministers in the same Department who cannot work together productively may also damage their relationships with Civil Servants, because they insert an extra variable – one which Civil Servants may factor in, to the detriment of the quality of the advice they provide.

Those who openly criticise their Civil Servants

A number of my interviewees thought that Ministers who were openly critical of their Civil Servants were simply passing the blame for their personal failure to those who they had worked closely with (see Chapter Six). Ben Bradshaw thought that public criticism from Ministers negatively influenced relationships. Although couched in party political terms, the crux of his argument is equally valid regardless of the party in power:

> "You show me an effective ministerial team and you'll get an effective department that's delivering for them. I'm afraid the sort of abuse that we are getting now from this government of the civil service is much more a reflection on the Government's incompetence and unprofessionalism than it is on the quality of the civil servants."

Lord Blencathra told me about his approach when he was speaking to potential Ministers in the Conservative ranks in the run up to the 2010 election:

> "I used to bash into them in 2007, 2008, 2009 'For God's sake don't attack the civil service, don't say Labour's been in power for twelve years the civil service are all pinkos, don't attack them. If there are difficulties in the civil service you're the Minister, you sort it out, you change your private office or give them policy'."

This aligns with the traditional Westminster view (Tant, 1993, p.191; Diamond and Richards, 2012, p. 189) that the inner workings of government should be confidential, with advice generally exempt from release. Ministerial responsibility remains relevant. That former Government Ministers had an extremely low opinion of Ministerial colleagues that

openly criticised Civil Servants, again suggests how fundamental the Westminster model is to the parameters of the relationship. On a related note, Lord Luce said:

> "I think so many politicians don't seem to understand what the point of a good, strong, robust, impartial civil service is."

A clear connection can be drawn here with the erosion of Haldane that I suggest has occurred in Chapter One.

Those who frequently change their mind about policy or do not think strategically

Lord Waldegrave highlighted another Ministerial characteristic that can negatively influence relationships with Civil Servants: a tendency to regularly change their minds. He thought this was one of the reasons that Tony Benn had struggled:

> "My view is that when Tony Benn, for example, in his memoirs talks about how he couldn't get his civil nuclear policy through – it was because (a) the civil servants knew that he didn't have the backing of his colleagues in Cabinet; and (b) because he kept changing his mind so they didn't know what he was trying to do."

Lord Waldegrave is suggesting that Tony Benn is guilty of a fundamental attribution error here – in blaming the Civil Service for their intransigence, when actually the problem was the inconsistency of his message to them, and their assessment that he was out on a limb politically and that none of his policies would be approved by the Cabinet. This is consistent with the views of Antony Part (see Chapter Two), and Richards and Smith (2004) who contend that the relationship suffers when one party to it ignores the rules of the game, or appeals to something radically different from Westminster tradition.

Lord Moore also told me that indecision, or a lack of strategic thought from Ministers, means that the Civil Service's role is enhanced:

> "…if you dither or if you haven't thought it through of course the civil service will fill the vacuum. Of course its policy has to continue; you can't live in a vacuum."

Fiona Mactaggart highlighted her own tendency to change her mind and the consequences for her relationships with her Civil Servants:

> "…they all thought I was a bit strange because of my passion, because of my, I call it flouncing with my team in here, I'll flounce about something and make a plan then have to change it."

Fiona Mactaggart's passion was clear, as was her belief in what she was trying to do[22]. However, several of my interviewees thought that a Minister who frequently changes their mind will leave Civil Servants slightly confused and unsure how much time and energy to invest in developing a specific policy.

[22] Fiona Mactaggart was the only Minister I spoke to who argued that the Civil Service should be politicised.

Conclusion

According to my interviewees, the single most important positive influence on relationships with Civil Servants is leadership from Ministers. The Ministers I spoke to placed great stall in their latitude to make a difference, appealing to a classic narrative within the Westminster model – what Richards and Smith (2004) call their ability to make a "historical impact". My interviewees also thought those who devote time to simple human interaction early on may be more likely to engender trust, loyalty and confidence. Relationships may be positively influenced as a result. Lord Blencathra's quirky start to life in the Home Office illustrates this.

Ministers who regularly show anger and frustration may find relationships are negatively influenced. Those who have created an environment of respect should challenge their Civil Servants. This may drive a higher level of performance and instil the relationship with the dynamism that it ideally needs. Ministers who attempt to mediate relationships with Civil Servants through Special Advisors may find those relationships are negatively influenced. Mutuality is still perceived as an important factor in successful tri-partite relationships between Ministers, Civil Servants and Special Advisors. Ministers who lack experience outside Westminster might not have an intrinsic understanding of what is viable in policy terms. This could lead to additional tension borne of Ministerial frustration at perceived Civil Service resistance – even if not wholly warranted.

Another less obvious influence appears to be Ministerial grade. My interviewees perceived that it was more difficult for junior Ministers to form good working relationships with Civil Servants, than more senior Ministers. Their own knowledge of the system, the contents of their Ministerial portfolio and the relative levels of support with which they are provided all help explain this distinction. Ministers who fail to work cohesively with their Ministerial colleagues may find their relationships with Civil Servants are negatively influenced. My interviewees were not impressed by colleagues who openly criticised the Civil Service – this undermines trust, which is a touchstone. Ministers who frequently change their mind on policy may also find relationships with their Civil Servants are negatively influenced. In addition, the tension created when unrealistic expectations are questioned by Civil Servants may cause difficulties.

Many of the perceived positive influences from the Ministerial perspective seem to have a connection with Haldane and the Westminster model in their classic form. Lord Moore, Lord Bradley, Lord Knight, Lord Blencathra and Fiona Mactaggart all gave examples where a safe space had been established with their officials, allowing a full and frank exchange of confidential views. Ministers who trust themselves to engage with their Civil Servants in this way were seen as more effective by their peers.

Conversely, a link can be drawn with many perceived negative Ministerial influences on relationships and the challenges to Haldane and the Westminster model. Isolating officials, diminishing their role, mediating relationships through special advisors, and creating undeliverable expectations grounded in ideology all negatively influenced relationships. These behaviours may be more prevalent where a cultural erosion of Haldane has occurred and Ministers either lack the confidence to change the rules of engagement they find, or simply do not realise that things can be different (and perhaps once were).

None of my interviewees made explicit reference to any of these concepts; most of them were probably reflected subconsciously. However, the relevance of these historical, traditional and stable concepts to the way Ministers still perceive relationships in government seems clear.

CHAPTER FIVE – POTENTIAL POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES ON RELATIONSHIPS – CIVIL SERVANTS

Having summarised potential positive and negative influences on relationships from the Ministerial side in Chapter Four, I look at the reverse perspective in Chapter Five. I have summarised in bullet form the traits and behaviours that my interviewees perceived that *Civil Servants* should display which might positively and negatively influence relationships with their Ministers. I asked each of my Ministerial interviewees whether positive or negative examples better represented their overall view of the Civil Servants they worked with collectively. From their answer to this question and my overall analysis of each interview, I gave each script a rough score. Thirteen of my twenty-five interviews I scored as "generally positive" concerning Civil Servants; ten I scored as "generally mixed"; and two I scored as "generally negative." Whilst my sample size is too small to draw any quantitative conclusions, this is important context to consider when looking at the traits I have drawn out, and the balance of material quoted to support each point made.

POSITIVE INFLUENCES

- Those who show commitment and demonstrate expertise
- Those who display fearlessness, honesty and independence
- Those who are committed to delivering policy once Ministers have made a final decision, regardless of their views about the merits of that policy
- Those who understand their Minister's philosophy

Those who show commitment and demonstrate expertise

Lord Bradley spoke in glowing terms about Civil Servants in the Department of Health who supported an independent review of mental health and criminal justice. He thought they were "…superb because of their utter, total commitment to this discrete project that we were working on." Whilst he experienced variable performance from his Civil Servants, his view was typical of many I spoke to in that the good examples comfortably outweighed the bad.

Commitment, hard work and pride were seen as extremely positive influences on relationships with Ministers, especially when Civil Servants could combine these with a keen intellect and strategic mind. Lord Skelmersdale, Lord Triesman, Ben Bradshaw, Lord Waldegrave, Lord Whitty, Baroness Liddell, Nick Raynsford, and Lord Browne all highlighted the quality and commitment of many of the Civil Servants they worked with.

Lord Browne highlighted the following traits as being most important in good Civil Servants:

> "I admired them because they were intelligent, strategic, and analytical. Not only that, but they could deliver, they were brave on many occasions, they took responsibility and they had a very keen sense of public service."

His invocation of the public service ethos suggests that his better officials were not operating from a rational choice perspective. Paul Goggins praised the imagination, effort and energy of Civil Servants. He highlighted another characteristic which he admired in Senior Civil Servants – that they did not pretend to know everything, that they had faith in their juniors and gave them due credit, but that they used their knowledge and expertise to give a view when the issue was then being discussed:

> "…more relaxed senior people would say – 'well Joe, or Mary, have done all the work here, so let them explain'. And then at the end they would say 'this is my reading of it – this is what I think are the strengths of this and the difficulties and the risks'. And that's what you want: you want the senior people to show judgement but let the younger people with real drive and enthusiasm explain themselves, because they've done the work."

This example demonstrates confidence in more junior Civil Servants with the knowledge of the detail, and in their own ability to read the situation strategically. It is an example which suggests that Civil Servants performing their traditional advisory role will be seen in a positive light by Ministers.

Those who display fearlessness, honesty and independence

Lord Luce told me about the principle he himself had lived by in his jobs as Governor of Gibraltar and as Lord Chamberlain to the Queen, and that he judged his Civil Servants by too:

> "The principle is that you are only valuable as an advisor if you are – and I use that word repeatedly – fearless in the advice you give. Courteous but fearless, because you're really no good unless you're taking that view."

Baroness Armstrong underlined the fundamental importance of the relationship with private office staff in particular. She also highlighted the need for vigorous debate and challenge from her officials:

> "I don't just want people to play the game, as it were. Good decisions come if you can get into the depth of the argument and I always appreciated that that was what they helped me to do."

Lord Glenarthur, Lord Knight, Lord Triesman and Ben Bradshaw expressed very similar views about the nature of the relationship and the critical importance of honest and unvarnished advice. What the Ministers I spoke to were articulating here connects closely to the deliberative space inherent in Haldane, as examined in Chapter One. Civil Servants who command this territory were seen as invaluable. There was a balance of Ministers from the Thatcher era, and the New Labour years, who expressed this view.

Honesty and frankness is even more valued when a Minister can see it is underpinned by clarity of thought. Sir Malcolm Rifkind told me about one occasion where a Civil Servant combined cogency and fearlessness in a situation where most would not dare to. He was interviewing for a new Private Secretary. One candidate took a different approach:

> "…instead of trying to impress me by agreeing with the Minister, he started an argument with me. He said 'no, I think you are quite wrong Minister, I'm of this opinion.' And we had an argy-bargee, and I thought actually this might be quite refreshing! So I appointed him as my private secretary."

The fact that there was a strong consensus on the value of these qualities from my interviewees also complements other findings that I have made. In Chapter Four, my interviewees told me that Ministers who lead, and are strong and decisive, positively influence relationships with Civil Servants. I have made a complementary finding here about the traits Ministers valued in Civil Servants: they may be most likely to positively influence relationships with Ministers when they are being strong Civil Servants. In both cases the qualities highlighted are sometimes characterised as the ones responsible for dysfunctional relationships – the dictatorial Minister against the argumentative Civil Servant. In actual fact, there is a mutual recognition of role from those who have a greater insight into the realities. It also seems that the traditional duality of Haldane is still seen as something that both parties to the relationship should aspire to.

Those who are committed to delivering policy once Ministers have made a final decision, regardless of their views about the merits of that policy

This finding follows from the one above, in that it concerns the actions of Civil Servants once they have given their advice and Ministers have taken a decision. One of the most instantly surprising tributes to his Civil Servants came from Lord Waldegrave. He cited the work of his Civil Servants on one of the greatest political disasters of modern times, the Poll Tax, as an exemplar:

> "…they did what was asked and made the best of what I think, in their heart of hearts, they thought was a bad policy. But they made it work; they couldn't prevent it finally going wrong when we tried to introduce it all in one go – that was bound to be a catastrophe. But the mistakes were political[23]."

John Healey had a very similar outlook. His best Civil Servants "understood the role and the nature of the relationship between elected politicians and the Civil Service." He praised the

[23] As one of the architects of the Poll Tax, Lord Waldegrave's defence of his Civil Servants here is particularly interesting - given the tendency for other observers to see it as an example of what happens when the Civil Service is *not* sufficiently robust. Examples include: Andrew Adonis, who chose to use the Poll Tax example in a workshop for prospective Labour Ministers prior to the 1997 election (Nick Raynsford attended); and Diamond (2014, p. 283). Roy Denman also considered that the Poll Tax was an example of a disaster caused when "…Ministers are told what they want to hear by timeservers pathetically anxious to please…" (Denman, 2002, p.49).

value of honest counsel, but thought that the ideal Civil Servant was quick to recognise that once the Minister had finally taken a decision, their role was clear.

Lord Blencathra provided a vivid example of a Civil Servant he described as "wonderful", and told me what he had said to him once their relationship had been established:

> " 'Minister, do know where I'm coming from. If you don't tell me what to do and you want me to draft a policy on juvenile offenders then I'll say "don't send them to prison, it's all society's fault, it's the government's fault, I'll slap them on the knuckles and that's it", that's what I'll draft. And if you tell me you want a policy to lock the little bastards up for life I will draft that policy. I will point out the flaws but if you insist on it as a civil servant I will do my damndest to carry through your orders.'
>
> He was maybe a one off, but he is my abiding memory of the British Civil Service. A man who said what he thought, but if you told him what to do, by God, he'd die in a ditch to do it."

Lord Triesman provided an example, with a very similar formulation. He praised the straight-forward and direct approach that his Civil Servants took, particularly during international crises when the stakes were extremely high. These are his reflections on the Persian Gulf capture in 2007, when British lives were in grave peril:

> "(My Civil Servants)…were very, very clear in what they thought and cautioned. I regarded that very highly; and then when I wanted to go for the lines that I wanted to go for, because I had to carry the can, they gave me every kind of support that I could have ever asked for."

In each example above, their Civil Servants gave full and frank advice. The Minister actually disagreed with the advice, and once his decision had been made, the Civil Servants in question were unflinching in their support of the Minister's position. In each case the Minister and the Civil Servants involved had an inherent understanding of the nature of the relationship between them, neither was impaired in their ability to fulfil their role and each had an intrinsic respect for the other party. It is particularly interesting that the most impassioned and praiseworthy reflections about individual Civil Servants all came within a

scenario *where the Minister did not agree with the advice that he received*. These reflections should be noted particularly by those in favour of reducing the impartiality or independence of the Civil Service. Again, the corroboration of core tenets of the Westminster model and Haldane seems clear.

Those who understand their Minister's philosophy

In talking about a Civil Servant understanding their Minister, Lord Moore alights on a critical point. If a Civil Servant "gets" their Minister's philosophy, then they can design policy in this light. Sometimes this will mean persuading them that there is a better alternative which still holds true to their vision:

> "Service means advising, thinking, helping to think through the ways in which they can achieve their policies and helping to create alternative policies that might achieve their objectives better and not being afraid to argue and articulate this."

Paul Goggins also admired adaptability – he liked those who "…got the message that I wanted to work in that particular kind of way."

The same point was made by John Denham. One of the examples he quoted concerned the introduction of ethical investment policies relating to pension schemes. The official in question understood the Minister's intended policy direction and turned that goal into something concrete:

> "…there was a civil servant who took what I wanted away and came up with something which was not only workable but had a major effect on investment behaviour in The City of London…"

These examples speak to the Civil Servant's ability to understand his or her Minister and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Again honesty and mutuality are important – a Minister who communicates clearly and openly with their Civil Servants will make this task a much easier one. The dynamism and creativity in the examples above suggest that the Civil Servants in question were working in tandem with their Ministers to create policy, rather than being separately tasked to deliver or manager it ex post facto.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

- Those who lack competence
- Those who undermine policy and seek control
- Those who are averse to change
- Those who lack external experience
- Those who do not lead, take responsibility, or communicate clearly

Those who lack competence

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the diaries and memoirs I examined suggested that a lack of competence and a desire to seek control were weaknesses which Ministers often associate with Civil Servants. The Ministers I spoke to provided relatively few examples of simple incompetence from their Civil Servants, but those that Lord Luce and Fiona Mactaggart provided had a negative influence on their relationships.

Lord Luce had varied experiences with his Civil Servants. The worst he encountered was an incompetent Private Secretary who made his life very difficult:

> "…in the Foreign Office my very first private secretary was a disaster and I found that he hadn't brought to me parliamentary questions which needed my answer quickly. I was set a ten day working day target and I found them one day in a cupboard."

The individual actually left the service as a result of this incident, but Lord Luce describes this eventuality as rare.

Fiona Mactaggart told me about an instance where the incompetence of her officials had left her badly prepared for a meeting with a foreign delegation, the results of which were confusing and embarrassing:

> "…the delegation alleged that I had agreed to something which I had no understanding of having agreed to and I don't believe I did agree to... I might have given them the impression that I agreed to something which I didn't agree to. I

> think that was one of the worst, I can deal with politics but I can't deal with being in a situation where you don't really know what's going on, that's not fair."

In this scenario she was utterly let down by her private office staff, in conjunction with those responsible for briefing her on the meeting, its content, format and goals. This was an example of incompetence at a very basic level – it left a lasting impression with a Minister who ended up unimpressed with the Civil Service at the end of her tenure. It also serves as a reminder that for all the systemic issues my interviewees identify (see Chapter Seven), sometimes very simple failures endure.

In any institution, individuals will always make mistakes. In government, the stakes are high. The very least that is always at risk is the reputation of the Minister. This might suggest one potential rationale for the cautious and hierarchical behaviours that are examined in Chapter Seven. Examples of simple incompetence were rare according to my interviewees. As I examine below, other traits and behaviours were far more concerning.

Those who undermine policy and seek control

My interviewees provided more examples of the second theme I identified in the literature (control). However, these examples were not representative of my interviewees' general experience. Lord Glenarthur's experiences with Civil Servants were overwhelmingly positive, but he did pick out one example where he was frustrated with their behaviour:

> "…officials in any of these departments would work on the submission, perhaps for a year then it would arrive in the Minister's box on a Friday night at four o'clock, and they would want an answer by Monday morning. Well, one simply had to say 'no'."

Ministers will sometimes feel that they are being 'bounced' or 'rail-roaded' into decisions by their officials (see for example Mullin, 2010, p.31 & p.142). Imposing an urgent deadline, with dire consequences if it is missed, is one manifestation. Lord Glenarthur gave no indication whether he suspected his Civil Servants were motivated by a desire to seek control in this instance, but his response was the only sensible one.

John Healey was left frustrated by resistance to a house building initiative – for reasons "none of which in the end stood up…"

Ben Bradshaw told me that he had experienced two types of private secretary and whilst most tried to help their Minister deliver, he came "across one or two who unfortunately saw their job primarily as defending the department from the Minister's desire to do anything."

John Denham provided an example of the worst that he saw from his Civil Servants through his time in office. It goes beyond change aversion, and is more redolent of a conscious determination to completely undermine Government policy and seek control:

> "…my first job as Secretary of State was at DIUS and I would say that the whole set of people who were responsible for skills policy were extremely and obstinately resistant to making changes to make the skills system operate effectively. We wasted millions of pounds on a system; they had designed a system which produced the numbers that they were meant to produce for the Treasury."

Lord Triesman considered that he was systematically undermined by a minority of individuals in the Foreign Office. He was also very critical of Civil Servants he encountered in the Home Office:

> "I don't think their heart was in it, I don't think they were committed to work, I think they systematically undermined things that they didn't like to do and I think that on occasions they were actually out in the open unwilling to do what government policy was."

John Denham and Lord Triesman's answers demonstrate that some Civil Servants are prepared to undermine a clear Ministerial decision. This can be done openly (Lord Triesman's example). However, a subtle approach is more common, though no more acceptable. These behaviours had an extremely negative influence on relationships. They hint at weak Civil Service management and leadership given the hierarchical nature of the service.

Those who are averse to change

Lord Knight thought that some Senior Civil Servants were locked in a traditional mindset which held them back:

> "…there are one or two who were a bit more old school and in the end were creatures much more of that silo mentality looking to do things the way they'd always been done."

Whilst Paul Goggins was keen to praise the collective knowledge and memory of Civil Servants, which spanned administrations and political masters, he also encountered the flip side of that coin. Namely officials who had done "…the same damn job for year after year…" and who had a set way of doing it. Even worse was their attitude when a Minister endeavoured to draw out their rationale:

> "But if you get into challenge or asking 'well, why is this the case?' - 'well, because it's always been or because that's the way we do it' well that's not really good enough, when you don't have a proper understanding now of why this is the right answer, not why it was the right answer fifteen years ago…"

Lord Whitty also suggested that intransigence can often be the result of relationships between some Senior Civil Servants and external stakeholders being too tight:

> "…some have a cosy life, are too close to the stakeholders, and are very resistant to change [when the driver is] either colleagues, Ministers, or other Departments."[24]

The importance for Civil Servants to have private sector experience and for interchange with the private sector to be increased is emphasised by my interviewees later in this chapter and forms part of the recent programme of Civil Service Reform (Cabinet Office, 2012).

[24] The dangers of very close relationships between stakeholders and Civil Servants with policy responsibility for the same area are highlighted in some of the Ministerial literature I have examined. See Chapter Two and the views of Major (2000, p.262) and Benn (1996, p.287) in particular.

If Civil Servants are perceived to be resistant to change, this may have an extremely negative influence on their relationships with Ministers. Frustration will result and advice on any other issue may be tainted in the Minister's eyes as a consequence. The literature explored in Chapter Two shows that Ministers, historically, have been concerned about the willingness and ability of their Civil Servants to adapt to change. As with the competence and control themes, a clear disparity emerged between the prevalence of this narrative in the literature and the experiences described by my interviewees. I explore this in Chapter Six.

Those who lack external experience

Lord Jenkin thought his Civil Servants lacked the necessary professional expertise to offer the right initial advice concerning the introduction of VAT. For Lord Jenkin this was an example of his principal concern:

> "…one of the central weaknesses of the civil service (is that) it's the only thing they've ever done."

John Denham expressed a very similar view. He thought there was too much emphasis on the concept of a Civil Service career rather than external interchange. The difference that experience could make was illustrated by one official who had worked externally:

> "…I had one guy worked at the Home Office, he spent a year running Wandsworth Prison, the quality of his advice on 101 issues was in a different league to people who'd never run anything. I put a lot of police officers into the Home Office on secondment but there's still not enough in and out movement."

Lord Whitty, Baroness Armstrong, Baroness Liddell, John Healey, and Lord Cope all expressed very similar opinions.

There was a strong consensus that a lack of external experience affects the quality of advice provided to Ministers. It will also affect the viability of delivering the policy in reality. As noted in Chapter Four, the problem may be compounded by the tendency for Ministers to have less career experience outside of Westminster than in times past.

Those who do not lead, take responsibility, or communicate clearly

Lord Whitty was concerned about the ability of his Civil Servants to collectively respond to outside shocks:

> "I picked up Agriculture five weeks into the foot and mouth epidemic. The machine had not cohered at that point – it required a whole range of departments and agencies to prioritise funding…it was clear that an outside shock like that, which happens from time to time, had completely thrown the machine..."

Lord Blencathra also identified this as a difficulty:

> "…you wake up one morning and two guys have gone over the wall at Parkhurst, often they (the Civil Service) weren't sharp on the political ramifications of things. So their response is 'I'll have an inquiry minister'… So response to crisis was often poor, not realising the political ramifications of having to do things quickly."

John Denham considered that he was poorly served by some of his officials in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. He was particularly disappointed at their refusal to take responsibility when serious problems emerged in relation to a programme of Further Education College building:

> "…I thought my civil servants just ran away, they ran for the hills and in the end I had to do nearly all the heavy lifting, I wasn't impressed..."

Crisis management per se was seen as a strength by others (e.g. Blair, 2010, p.206), and several Ministers I spoke to told me about the effort and commitment their Civil Servants had shown. In contrast to Lord Whitty, Ben Bradshaw praised his Civil Servants for their work during the foot and mouth crisis[25]. Lord Whitty and Lord Blencathra's examples concern outside shocks, whereas John Denham's concerns a crisis of the Civil Service's own making. However, these examples share some common threads – they hint at a tendency

[25] Ben Bradshaw told me: "...we had bird flu and foot and mouth. It's like running a war and civil servants would be working 24 hours a day round the clock, would sleep in the department or sleep in hotels, really the team work and camaraderie and dedication that was displayed in crises like that was really impressive."

to consider such crises as lying solely in the political realm and a failure of speed and coherence in response. Again they raise questions about leadership and a reluctance to take responsibility. The fact that some Civil Servants consider that the barrier between their responsibilities and their Minister's responsibilities is so categorical may also suggest that some relationships have become more transactional.

If Civil Servants are not completely honest with their Ministers, then the foundation of the relationship may be eroded. Lord Whitty told me that some Civil Servants were reluctant to tell Ministers bad news.

Paul Goggins did not like Senior Civil Servants who did not understand policy detail, but would pretend that they did:

> "The people who hide behind their position, pulling the strings of very able, but more junior, colleagues and trying to take all the credit for their ideas and solutions when they came[26]."

Again, the consequences of a lack of honesty from Civil Servants are clear – as is the ease at which the Minister was able to see through the charade. Insecurity coupled with a desire for self-promotion at the expense of colleagues is likely to have a negative influence on relationships with Ministers and with other Civil Servants.

[26] This is corroborated by the admission of one former Senior Civil Servant - Stephen Burbridge - who wrote that he "blushingly accepted" praise for a brief prepared for his Minister, Keith Joseph. He states: "I can say without immodesty that the brief was of a high standard, even up to the intellectual demands of its illustrious recipient. It had however not been written by me but my clever assistant, though by some secretarial subterfuge my signature at the bottom had suggested my authorship." (Burbridge, 2007, p.5 of extract). Burbridge considers the "special praise" he received for the brief he had *not* written secured him promotion.

Conclusion

Relationships are positively influenced, as perceived by my Ministerial interviewees, when their Civil Servants demonstrate certain qualities. Civil Servants need to show commitment, honesty, skill and awareness. The most impassioned and compelling stories emerged where the Minister knew that the Civil Servant did not agree with the course of action he or she had chosen, but was unwavering in their support anyway. The importance of honesty was also clear. As Lord Luce said, you are only valuable as an advisor if you are fearless in the advice you give. Lord Waldegrave told me that Civil Servants needed to be "...dissident without being disloyal..." Skill was often connected with subject specialism and expertise by my interviewees. However, skill is not just technical: forming a human understanding of their Minister's philosophy and using that as a template for creating policy was seen as invaluable. Political and real world awareness was the final quality identified. Ministers may put more faith in advice from Civil Servants who demonstrate this awareness, and relationships may be positively influenced.

Although good experiences far outweighed bad, the negative influences identified were more varied. Simple and obvious incompetence was rare – but tended to leave a marked impression. Aversion to change and refusal to accept changed realities after the event were more commonly identified by my interviewees. There were some isolated cases of individuals systematically undermining policy decisions. This raises serious questions for the leadership of the Civil Service. A lack of real world experience, refusal to take responsibility and lead, and a refusal to furnish the Minister with all the facts were also identified. The first refers to a recognised skills gap, the others hint at a desire for self-protection. Adopting a parochial attitude is not likely to positively influence relationships.

My interviewees suggested that successful relationships with Ministers are often based on symbiosis, mutuality and partnership. In doing so they effectively endorsed many traditional elements of the Westminster model. A number of the behaviours they perceived as positive are rooted in classic Haldaneian duality, as identified above and discussed in Chapter One. My sample size is not sufficient to identify whether Ministerial perceptions over time reflect the apparent contraction of the deliberative space that the literature

suggests has occurred[27]. It is worth noting that there was a balance of positive citations which implicitly invoked Haldane, between the Conservative and Labour Ministers I interviewed. But negative views about Civil Service behaviour were stronger and more frequently expressed by the Labour Ministers I interviewed. That appears consistent with the literature considered in Chapter One (in that the space began to contract during the Thatcher administration, and that the direction of travel has not subsequently been reversed).

The dominant themes I derived from ministerial literature about the Civil Service in Chapter Two, featuring concerns about "competency" and "control", were not corroborated by my interviewees. There was a significant disparity between the conspicuous references to "incompetence" in the Ministerial literature and the experiences of my interviewees. The instances identified where Civil Servants undermined policy decisions, withheld information, and demonstrated an aversion to change offer limited corroboration of the "control" theme. However they were not representative of the overall experience that my ministerial interviewees had. The frequency and nature of my interviewees' experiences relating to the "control" theme do not chime with its prominence in the literature. I explore this in Chapter Six.

[27] Very recent interview material published by the Institute for Government (2016) suggests that several formal Coalition Ministers – including Ken Clarke, David Laws, and Baroness Kramer – think that Civil Servants do not always offer sufficient challenge to Ministers.

CHAPTER SIX: EXPLAINING THE DISPARITY BETWEEN THE MINISTERIAL LITERATURE AND THE VIEWS OF MINISTERIAL INTERVIEWEES ABOUT CIVIL SERVANTS

The disparity evident between the prevailing narrative in the ministerial literature and the views of my interviewees requires further examination. The themes I identified in the literature, concerning the competence of Civil Servants and their desire to seek control (Chapter Two), were not borne out by the experiences reported by my ministerial interviewees (Chapter Five). I was surprised about the extent of the disparity that emerged. I asked my interviewees why they considered this "narrative" about Civil Servants existed, in apparent contrast to their overall experience. There were three broad answers to the question – and they were not mutually exclusive. Firstly because politicians need someone to blame failure on they invoke a "lazy" narrative. Secondly because the public do not trust bureaucrats, of whom they are sceptical. And thirdly, because elements of the narrative are true. These are considered in turn below.

(i) Because politicians need someone to blame their failures on

Lord Knight identified several points that many of my other interviewees concurred with. For him the narrative has prevailed because it is in the interests of certain politicians for it to do so:

> "If those people commentating are politicians then it's quite safe and comforting …because it means you have got someone to blame if things don't go right. And…if you have a view that government should be as small as possible – public sector: bad; private sector: good – then it suits that narrative too. But – by and large – I just think it's lazy."

The public, private sector split was mentioned in identical terms by Lord Browne who also referred to it as a "lazy narrative". The suggestion here is that some former Ministers are critical of individual Civil Servants as a result of their ideological standpoints, which are refracted through their stories about relationships within government. Paul Goggins was critical of some of the memoirs and diaries that in his view misrepresent the relationship:

> "Sometimes you get these books by ex-ministers that are for the most part deeply un-helpful about describing the relationship between Ministers and civil servants,

> and explaining what civil servants are, and do. They seem to rather demean them and I think that's sometimes the sense of failure from the Minister that they didn't make the best of the opportunities they had – and blame the civil servants for it."

Lord Moore and Lord Whitty both told me that politicians are often prone to trying to explain away their failures, and transfer the blame. Ben Bradshaw suggested that there is an inverse relationship between effectiveness as a politician and criticism of the Civil Service. Lord Blencathra echoed this - saying that he "…could identify a few ministers, former ministers who probably didn't rate their civil servants, but I didn't rate them as ministers." In his view these individuals were most likely to be insecure and suspicious of challenge. Lord Cope shifted the emphasis to the personal ideology of the Ministers involved: "…some of my colleagues think of the civil service as being obstructive but they are the ones who'd expect to think that they're obstructive on the whole."

Lord Waldegrave expressed a very similar view:

> "Being a Minister is often a frustrating business because reality won't do what you want it to do. So you have to blame somebody, and you obviously can't blame yourself, because you're a hero. And the easiest people to hand are the civil servants."

There is a connection here with my assessment in Chapter Two that those politicians with the highest expectations of power may have found themselves most disappointed with the reality.

As illustrated above, a number of the former Ministers I interviewed effectively laid the blame for the existence of a narrative, which they saw as unhelpful, at the hands of other politicians. Generally those who they considered had been unsuccessful to some degree and had an axe to grind. There is a clear suggestion that those who publicly criticise their Civil Servants are – to some extent – being *deliberately* misleading in order to offset their own political failure.

There is also a strong connection here with the self – perpetuating mythology of the Westminster model as previously examined (Rhodes, 2011), and the views of Richards and

Smith (2004) who suggest that the "narrative" Ministers appeal to concerning the Westminster model is one of "historical impact."

(ii) Because the public do not trust bureaucrats, of whom they are sceptical

Another rationale advanced for the existence of the narrative was the public's historical scepticism concerning bureaucrats – in particular the fact that Civil Servants are often the people who have to say 'no' to the public, their role is not widely understood and they do not have a voice through which to articulate it. The implication is that some Ministers may consciously play into the perceptions of the public, when it is in their interests to do so.

Lord Browne thought that the latest political fashion for marketing the value of change, whilst not really changing very much at all, was causing further detriment to the reputation of the Civil Service:

> "Everybody has bought into the Obama/change message: modern politics is about defining yourself as near as you can to the status quo, and using the word 'change' as often as possible. The civil service are, in a certain sense, the ultimate manifestation of the status quo. If you define yourself against what you are not, then it's easy to do that."

Baroness Liddell thought that the narrative existed partly "…because of the challenge the citizen has with bureaucracy." Lord Waldegrave also felt that most functions of Government are regulatory, and "involves doing things that mean saying 'no' to people; and people objected to that."

Lord Whitty made a similar observation, suggesting that business leaders, campaigners and the media get frustrated by their interaction with government and "...put it down to caution, risk aversion, bureaucracy, when actually civil servants are doing their job."

Another important point drawn out by some of my interviewees was that the inherent nature of Civil Servants means they are bound to be perceived in a certain way, especially by the public. In Baroness Cumberlege's words:

> "It's because they are not meant to be at all high profile, that they are perceived to be faceless."

Arguably, it is constitutionally inappropriate for the public to know the professional opinions of Civil Servants under the existing model. It is not the role of Civil Servants to refute public perceptions concerning them, nor do they have any voice by which to do so.

(iii) Because elements of the narrative which concern the inherent nature of the relationship are true

A number of the politicians I interviewed had a very different answer to my question about why the narrative exists. Out of my twenty five interviewees, none explicitly suggested that the narrative was simply "true". However, some thought they were clear elements of truth in it.

Fiona Mactaggart was clear that Civil Servants were often to blame for failure. She thought that the Civil Service was designed to lack passion and that:

> "… (The narrative) is a product of the professional civil service because if you look at all these memoirs all these people think "my God, I pull levers and it doesn't happen at the ground". It probably does if you're Prime Minister, but it doesn't for lots and lots of ministers. And when it hasn't happened, they don't tell you it hasn't happened, so you have to go and find out that it hasn't happened and then pull again or find some new lever."

In her view the distance between policy and delivery, in the Home Office for example, was deliberately long. That could be seen as an implicit criticism of the legacy of the Next Steps initiative. She also thought that the narrative was accurate because the careful usage of language was the asset most valued by the Civil Service[28], and that this was dangerous.

[28] Former Civil Servant Clive Ponting's views are extremely similar: "Preoccupied with their relationship with ministers, top civil servants become too obsessed with presentation and short term political requirements. An ability to 'draft round' problems and economise elegantly with the truth are skills more highly prized in this environment than an interest in good industrial relations or forward planning." (Ponting, 1989, p.16)

Whilst Fiona Mactaggart's acceptance of the narrative represents a clear countervailing opinion amongst my interviewees, she made a related point about the importance of fitting the mould being a critical qualifier for recruitment and promotion. Lord Triesman concurred. He also considered that there were some characteristics of the Civil Service that had not changed, and that recruitment practices meant that the Civil Service was not sufficiently diverse or representative of modern society.

Lord Whitty considered that there was some truth to the narrative. Alun Michael also thought that there were "…too many people at a Director General level who think that they know it all." He felt that the inflexibility of processes and a misguided desire to create targets that acted as a "proxy for profit" were unhelpful. There is a clear linkage here with my contention that the relationship has become closer to principal-agent, than symbiotic partnership. The adoption of managerial, transactional, metrics is not seen as fitting with the role that Alun Michael believes the Civil Service should be playing. He also considered that Civil Service recruitment practices encouraged a culture where people need to tick a box to say they have a certain skillset to advance – whereas the need to actually develop that skill was overlooked. All of these behaviours might be serving to further entrench the narrative.

When I asked Baroness Liddell about the consistency of the narrative over a number of years she said:

> "Well I think if you look at any large organisation, they have ways of doing things. And because of those ways of doing things, they attract a particular kind of person…(T)he nature of the institution moulds people. And if you mould the people then you perpetuate the institution."

There is a clear connection here with the argument advanced by Grant and Jary (2010), as considered in Chapter Two.

Conclusion

When I asked my interviewees why an established narrative about the Civil Service existed, three broad answers emerged. Each one of them is highly plausible and I suspect a combination of all three takes us as close to "an answer" as it is possible to get.

To revisit the first broad answer, the openness with which the Ministers I interviewed criticised other Ministers, for criticising Civil Servants, was the first point that emerged. The implication is that a particular desire to blame officials came from those who were aware of their own political failings and wished to assuage them. The second answer cut straight to the heart of the public's relationship with bureaucracy at a philosophical level and their healthy scepticism of the unelected official wielding power. The third answer is equally as valid – because some elements of the narrative established in the literature are grounded in reality.

The ministerial literature I have considered is likely to be biased, with authors playing into narratives established about the bounds of their role, within the Westminster model (Richards and Smith, 2004). As Rhodes (2012) suggests[29] there is a risk that the ministerial world portrayed in the literature can be heavily constructed, as many of my interviewees thought. However, despite the obvious limitations, memoirs and diaries remain the best source material for insights into relationships, and the behaviours of Civil Servants. The perspective the literature establishes, as examined in Chapter Two, cannot be dismissed on the basis of the views of twenty-five Ministerial interviews.

When preparing my interview scripts, I included a question which asked for views on why a narrative about the Civil Service appeared to exist. I characterised this narrative as part of the question, with reference to the control and competency themes that I had derived. As the interviews unfolded, it became clear to me that the prevailing view of my interviewees was more positive than the one established in the ministerial literature. In effect, this

[29] "The Westminster narrative is the classical constitutional view of British government. Its core tenet is a belief in centralisation or hierarchy, with its roots in the royal prerogative and the monarchical origins of British government…It sustains the view that history is made by great men and, after Margaret Thatcher, great women… there are great pressures on authors to conform to a profitable template; the narrative drive of the chronological detective story that reveals the true man or woman as it excuses their faults." (Rhodes, 2012, Pp 23-4).

question gave my interviewees a chance to explain why a disparity existed between their views and the literature. I consider that all their explanations are extremely plausible.

In addition, the enthusiasm my interviewees had to participate needs to be considered. I consider the methodology I deployed to identify my potential sample, is sound (as set out in Chapter Three). It may be that those former Ministers who responded had a more positive view about the Civil Service, than those who chose not to respond. It may be that my presence (as interviewer) may have biased the responses of my interviewees (Creswell, 2003, p.186), given my role as a Civil Servant. Whilst I cannot rule these possibilities out, I am not convinced that either was significant.

I suspect that some other variables may have been more relevant. Firstly, the very different nature of responding to questions in a research interview, as compared to crafting a narrative for publication in a memoir. Secondly, the time that had elapsed between my interviews taking place and my interviewees leaving office. Whilst my literature review also spans a broad range of time – there is an important difference. Diaries are created when their authors are in office and memoirs are generally published shortly after the author has left office. Time for reflection will be limited. It was at least two years since any of my interviewees had been in office; and it was in excess of twenty years for some.

Thirdly, although ten of my ministerial interviewees had served in the Cabinet, a number of my interviewees were not “household” names – or had not been so for a number of years. They may have paid less heed to expectations as a result. Fourthly, my impression was that my interviewees were giving me their genuine views, in support of my research aim. There were very few attempts to make party political points (potentially as my interviewees understood that, as a Civil Servant, this could put me in an uncomfortable position).

Finally - and most importantly - my interviewees did have a number of serious criticisms. However, these tended to be systemic rather than personal and were more nuanced than much of the material I derived from the literature. I deal with these criticisms in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN – SYSTEMIC ISSUES WHICH MAY BE NEGATIVELY INFLUENCING RELATIONSHIPS

At the end of Chapter Six, I concluded that there was a body of opinion expressed in my interviews which was not predominantly concerned with individual relationships. Some of the disparity between the views of my interviewees and the views expressed in ministerial literature can be explained by the nature of the criticism that my interviewees had. This took the form of systemic or institutional comments about the Civil Service in general, rather than its constituents. Arguably this reflects a broader tendency for Ministers to praise individual civil servants for the support they provide, whilst at the same time criticising the Civil Service as an institution for its lack of relevant skills (Richards and Smith, 2016, p.3).

Relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants all operate within a context that many of my interviewees had serious concerns about. Some of my interviewees perceived that institutional and structural problems are putting pressure on relationships. An awareness of these features might assist Ministers and Civil Servants in their interactions and may also prevent both parties making attribution errors when considering the others' role. The Ministers I spoke to highlighted a number of strengths that our model holds. However, the dominant opinion was that there are a number of institutional barriers which the Civil Service creates, and that these may negatively influence relationships between Ministers and Civil Servants. In summary:

- Relationships between Departments perceived to be dysfunctional and feudal; practices are inconsistent
- Perceived systemic reluctance to expose Ministers to internal policy debates
- Frustration with the hierarchical nature of the Civil Service
- Perception that the Civil Service incentivises the wrong behaviours, values the wrong skills and has the wrong recruitment priorities
- Concern at the changing nature of the relationship and potential politicisation
- Inadequacy of training, preparation and induction for Ministers

Relationships between Departments are dysfunctional and feudal; practices are inconsistent

A number of my interviewees perceived cross departmental relationships as problematic. This parallels the extant literature concerning the baronial and feudal nature of central government architecture. In essence this is the contention that the structure of Whitehall imbues each Department and Cabinet Minister with a high concentration of power, but provides little incentive for collegiate working across Departments[30]. Seen it its most negative light, the structure of Whitehall incentivises each Minister to pursue their own agenda, all the while competing with their own Cabinet colleagues for political capital, whilst their Departments compete with each other for the largest possible budget allocation from the Treasury. In this light, it is consistent with rational choice theory as discussed in Chapters One and Three, with both officials and Ministers acting in self-interest as budget or utility maximisers.

Lord Knight told me that the complex inter-relationships between Whitehall departments were a critical issue for the Civil Service as a whole:

> "…[W]here there is, I think, a degree of dysfunctionality, if that's not too strong a word, is the rivalries and the frictions between departments, so that as a service as a whole it is not more than the sum of its parts, to some extent it's less than the sum of its parts."

Lord Knight also provided a telling example of where a constructive relationship between two Ministers was not mirrored by the relationships between each Department's Civil Servants:

[30] See Powell (2010, Pp.76-78) for a general summary; Part (1990, Pp 173-4) for a Permanent Secretary's view on whether loyalties should always lie with a Civil Servant's own Minister; Williams (2010) and Crossman (1979) who both suggest that Ministers factor in the relative strength of various Departments into potential machinery of Government changes; and Bevir and Rhodes (2008, p.7) who consider that baronial politics is a check on Prime Ministerial power. Kaufman (1997, Pp 14-17) also urges ministers to avoid what he calls "Departmentalitis" – where Ministers forget that they are members of the Government and simply pursue their own Department's goals regardless of the relative merits of the argument or the Government's broader aims. Jim Callaghan is one Minister who admitted he was prone to suffering from this in junior office (Callaghan, 1987, p.98). Diamond (2014, p.284) identifies resistance to working across departmental lines, and the dangers of adopting a 'silo mentality', as part of a range of problems with a structure where power is concentrated centrally.

> **"**I was working very well with my opposite number at trying to integrate skills and employment support more thoroughly and whilst there was joint working on a paper, to actually make that happen took more time than I had, or Kevin had, just to get the civil service and their different targets and alignments to properly work, because – in the end – they just didn't get it and they didn't want it."

Lord Jenkin was of the view that very strong departmental points of view can stymie the effectiveness of Government as a whole. As with Lord Knight, in his view the driver for departmentalism is the Civil Service itself. He laments the feudal nature of Whitehall where each Department defends its own turf feverishly:

> "(Civil Servants)…ought, if necessary, to try and resolve their differences with the other department, rather than feeling it's always necessary to use their Ministers to fight their corner, and at the end go back triumphantly to the Department saying 'well we won that one.'"

Lord Bradley gave an even more prosaic example. A range of staff arrived at his office on a Monday morning:

> "They hadn't done their homework, they hadn't put together a coordinated response to me and I realised this within about fifteen minutes. So I said 'go away, you've all arrived in London… come back either later tonight or tomorrow morning with a proper response' and they all trooped sheepishly out of the office. When they came back they had a very effective response."

I asked Lord Bradley whether he thought that Ministers or Civil Servants were primarily responsible for the feudal structure of Whitehall and the culture of departmentalism that he was alluding to. He said: "I don't think it's driven by ministers; ministers are too transient to impose it." For Lord Knight, Lord Jenkin and Lord Bradley, the Civil Service were the drivers for feudalism, not Ministers[31].

[31] Cowper-Coles provides an interesting counter-example. For him, the relationship between Robin Cook and Clare Short (when Foreign Secretary and International Development Secretary respectively) was very difficult, mostly because Short was a Brown ally, and Cook was not. The consequence was that Short "…seemed to wage unrelenting war on the Foreign Office and all its works." (2013, Pp 214-5). Cowper-Coles was speaking from a position close to Cook, but his example illustrates the potential for inter-ministerial politics to define broader relationships between two Whitehall departments, at least temporarily.

John Healey pinpointed the systemic difficulty in making changes that had an impact on other Departments – and linked this point to the actions of individual Civil Servants. He suggests that some Civil Servants use the structure of Whitehall as a means of derailing their own Minister's policy:

> "Inevitably, some of the hardest things - even from the Treasury - to get through were changes that involved other departments. I had a period as Minister for the Office of Government Commerce - there were examples there, the head at the time essentially tried to use the inertia in Whitehall to stop anything changing."[32]

Lord Whitty concurred, making the salient point that progress will only be made at the pace of the slowest player. Sir Malcolm Rifkind pointed to the flawed privatisation of the railway network in the early 1990's, which he considered was caused by the Treasury's dominance over the Department for Transport:

> "Anyway, I lost that battle because the Treasury were convinced that the only way you could get competition was by not giving one operator the ownership of the track. I argued, and my officials argued, that competition was not from other railway operators, the competition was from road and air."

This is an acknowledgement from the Secretary of State for Transport who privatised the railways *that he did not fully support his own policy* – and that this had been imposed on the Department for Transport by the Treasury. The changes John Healey, Lord Whitty, and Sir Malcolm Rifkind refer to each indicate the enduring importance of centralised power within the executive. Each example is representative of the dynamics of that power.

A slight variation on Sir Malcolm's point was made by Nick Raynsford. In his case, the other variable was Number Ten rather than the Treasury. And in this instance his officials were not being overruled by others, they were substituting their own professional opinions and beliefs for what they thought that Number Ten might want them to say:

[32] John Healey's terminology here ("inertia") is identical to Tony Blair's (2010, p.19).

> "…one quite senior civil servant said to me on a particular policy approach being pushed hard by Downing Street, they didn't think it was right but because Downing Street clearly wanted it this is what they would advise me to do. I said 'This is not your role. You are there to advise the minister in your department what you and the department believes is right'… That trend was becoming more obvious: that ambitious civil servants would not be seen to be a block to what Number Ten wanted."

He recalls his shock at this encounter, which he thought reduced the interaction to the "…Tony Benn view of politics…" where the relationship is not constructive and Civil Servants block and Ministers waste energy combating them. There is a remarkable similarity between the example above, and one given in the Crossman diaries (Crossman, 1979, p.148[33]) although in the latter example the Treasury is the suitor. The example also corroborates the view that New Labour federalised power within Whitehall (Richards, 2008).

In this particular example, the motivation of the Civil Servants involved was dishonest and self serving, but in other situations the Departmental interest will be genuinely different to the cross Governmental interest. The Minister will still expect his Civil Servants to consider his or her Department first. A recent Public Accounts Committee report also criticises corporate leadership and accountability within the Civil Service (Public Accounts Committee, 2014). Cabinet Secretary Jeremy Heywood believes that there is still a cultural problem when it comes to cross-Governmental working and the natural tendency is for the Departmental line to be defended[34].

[33] "All my key officials, the two Deputies for example, know that promotion comes to them not from the Minister – he has virtually nothing to do with it – but from the standing which they have in the eyes of the Treasury… It is this relationship which makes so many higher civil servants willing to spy for the Treasury and to align themselves with the Treasury view even against their own Minister." (Crossman, 1979, p.148).

[34] Sir Jeremy Heywood: "…we are making less progress on finding the magic bullet to how we get cross-departmental working right the way down. That depends a lot on Ministers working co-operatively together, having been asked to by the Prime Minister, and on permanent secretaries coming together in groups and agreeing: "We will get our teams to work together." That is more of a culture problem, because people are still more inclined to defend a departmental line. So I think that is the bigger challenge than the Treasury and Cabinet Office. I do not think that we have got the answer to that..." (Public Accounts Committee (2), 2014, Q97).

Systemic reluctance to expose Ministers to internal policy debates

Lord Jenkin hinted at another issue - that Ministers find it immensely beneficial to be exposed to the internal debate that their Civil Servants may be having on policy:

> "…some Departments…will only let you see the submissions from the top tier… [In HMT] you were able to see all the previous submissions down the line as part of the briefing you had."

Sir Malcolm Rifkind made a very similar point. He remembers an occasion where his officials gave him written advice, but the Department had been unable to reach a common view on what the conclusion or recommendation should be. They apologised, but he saw the lack of consensus as a positive. He realised that in most cases advice is drafted at a relatively junior level and is altered as it is approved through a management chain. It is therefore most likely to reflect the views of the last person to approve it, who will be the most senior:

> "So I said 'well actually, from my point of view as a Minister, it makes a difference to me whether the advice from my officials is unanimous… or whether my officials themselves have a deep division of opinion on the merits of the various options.' That's actually important for me to know, and if that is covered up… as far as I am concerned that is negative, not positive."

Baroness Liddell told me about some untypical behaviour from her Civil Servants when she was trying to deal with the miss-selling of personal pensions:

> "…I had civil servants who were actually prepared to argue with one another in front of me, and that arguing actually helped me to form a view."

She went on to say that Civil Servants needed to be more open with Ministers and that it was important for Ministers to see them disagreeing with each other and that this was positive. Lord Luce gave a very similar view.

The consensus here indicates the rarity of Civil Servants having an open and intellectual debate on policy in front of Ministers, and the immense value to the Minister of being able to witness the discussion[35]. It is an unwritten Civil Service rule that officials should not argue in front of Ministers – and certainly not when one official out ranks the other. When people have not discussed in advance or coordinated a position, a Minister is unlikely to gain insight from beholding the muddle that might ensue. Lord Bradley's earlier example is illustrative. However, when there are genuine differences of professional opinion, which are respectful, well founded and represent the fact that there are several viable options a Minister could choose – then hearing those issues debated in front of them can only be of value. There could be a connection between the challenge to Haldane considered in Chapter One, and the behaviour identified above. However, I suspect in this instance, the issue is rooted in long-standing hierarchical behaviours.

Hierarchical Issues

The sub-title above is relevant to the broader concerns my interviewees had concerning hierarchy. Ben Bradshaw found the hierarchical nature of the Civil Service a source of some frustration:

> "…what you would often find is some very good, talented, motivated people, young people in the more junior positions. Who in many ways were much better than some of the people who had been around a long time, but just hadn't made their way up the hierarchy yet. So I think mechanisms to fast track young talent but also mechanisms to deal with underperformance I think is really, really important…"

John Denham agreed. Once he had been in office for some time Lord Whitty felt that he had the necessary confidence and status to override the hierarchy, and ask for certain individuals to be instructed on certain tasks.

When I asked John Healey what suggestions he might have for ensuring mutual understanding between Ministers and Civil Servants is improved, part of his answer focused directly on the need for senior managers to trust their staff:

[35] Tony Crosland was another Minister who enjoyed this rare tendency amongst his Civil Servants, according to Roy Denman: "Working for Crosland was also fun because he liked a certain amount of argument in the Department… he had a horror of the sanitised unanimity of a formal departmental presentation. He liked to hear opposing points of view argued out." (Denman, 2002, p.111).

> "Allow the civil servants with the expertise and the ideas access to ministers, instead of mediating at the most senior level."

Lord Blencathra told me about a speech he had asked an SEO staff member to write a speech. She had understood his steer, but her seniors had intervened:

> "I discovered she had drafted what she thought I wanted, the grade seven changed that, the grade five changed it too and the grade three changed it too and eventually I changed it back to what she wanted."

The various rungs in the management ladder all wished to add value here by intervening, when in reality all they did was make the process un-necessarily complicated. A more junior official is likely to have the highest degree of expertise in a distinct area of policy. More senior officials are likely to have a better grasp of the strategic implications of policy, and a better feel for its viability. Ideally both will contribute – in the manner described by Paul Goggins in Chapter Four.

However, some of the Ministers I spoke to found the different approaches adopted in different departments confusing. It was clear that no one had ever explained to them why they existed. Perhaps the most obvious answer here is communication. If a senior official can explain to a Minister why officials of certain grades will or will not be interacting with them – then the Minister will not be left having to second guess why certain people have been sent to brief them and others have not.

Incentivises the wrong behaviours, values the wrong skills and has the wrong recruitment priorities

Some of my interviewees thought that one of the major systemic problems that the Civil Service has is that it incentivises the wrong behaviours and values the wrong skills. Fiona Mactaggart was generally negative in her views about the Civil Service. She suggested that the Civil Service will attract a certain type of person, and that will shape its collective organisational behaviour. For her, those at the top had certain skills that had allowed them to ascend:

> "Actually [those who get] through the system on the whole have been able to kind of deflect, put down, and avoid challenge I think."

Whilst her general view about the quality of the Civil Servants she worked with was atypical, some of my other interviewees also had issues with the culture of the Senior Civil Service. Alun Michael considered that there was a problem in "the way that the Civil Service is structured to serve the Permanent Secretary and members of the Directorate General."

John Denham felt that whilst he had encountered a large variation in the quality of individual Civil Servants, the most critical problems were systemic ones: "…it (the Civil Service) is poorly equipped to meet the challenges of modern government." He was critical of the value placed on certain skills as compared to others:

> "…the Civil Service is not sufficiently numerate very often… it's surprising the number of people who were inept at budgets and other issues who really struggled with concepts like stock and flow, inevitability and risk and assessment."

Lord Blencathra referred to the establishment of the Major Projects Leadership Academy[36] – which aims to equip Civil Servants with better procurement skills. In his view, for this to work then trust must be placed in the person who has completed the training:

> "There's no point any man or woman doing this course for a year… if you're then going to put ten other people in their way, including the Perm Sec who hasn't done the course."

Another issue which emerged concerned staff deployment, and an apparent lack of strategy. Lord Whitty told me that he thought staff moved around too much:

> "I'm not sure that the marketing of jobs, as opposed to having your career mapped out by someone in human resources, is actually necessarily the best way of doing things[37]."

[36] The Major Projects Leadership Academy was established with the Saïd Business School at Oxford University – it is designed to bestow major project leadership skills within the Civil Service, engrain that knowledge, and reduce the reliance on expensive private sector outsourcing in relation to major projects (Saïd Business School, 2014).

Baroness Cumberlege, Lord Moore and Lord Cope all expressed very similar views – pointing out the likely detriment to collective memory.

Concern over the changing nature of the relationship and potential politicisation

Lord Waldegrave was concerned that under New Labour there had been a shift in the expectations placed on Civil Servants in terms of political presentation of policy:

> "…I was very anxious that Blair's style of Government…and the erosion of Cabinet Committees, the erosion of Minutes – I thought that was making it far less clear for Whitehall what the marching orders from the politicians were. And there was a danger of eroding the distinction between political input and policy advice and obviously execution."

Lord Cope and Lord Luce shared the concerns above about politicisation. Lord Bradley gave a fascinating insight into what he seemed to regard as some scrambled minds in the Home Office. In a reversal of the usual formulation, he suggests that some of his Civil Servants were allowing the media frenzy around certain controversial law and order issues to drive their policy making, rather than looking at long term objectives:

> "…events all the time overtake sensible policy decisions, the media are very intrusive, and it's very easy to be buffeted by those events. Politicians clearly have to reflect public opinion but it gets very uncomfortable if that agenda is being set externally… I sometimes felt the civil servants played to the more narrow perspective – they had tunnel vision on their policy area rather than seeing the bigger picture."

In this example, there is a clear suggestion that Lord Bradley's Civil Servants had 'swung too far the other way'. They had paid too much heed to the political realities, the media attention, and the pressure for instant and instinctive action. They may have let these factors drive their policy making rather than more traditional Civil Service considerations –

[37] In my related research, Lord Butler made the same point about the marketisation of jobs – in almost exact terms.

particularly concerning the long term application and utility of policy. Lord Bradley's example was atypical – but it should not be ignored.

The answers my interviewees gave in this section corroborate the view expressed in Chapter One that greater societal expectations have increased the pressure on relationships in recent years. The demands on Ministers appear to have increased, so the demands they have of their Civil Servants may also have increased accordingly. The fear that some of my interviewees expressed is that the Civil Service's reaction to these demands is a consensual blurring of constitutional lines. This seems to be consistent with the changes to the relationship instigated by the Thatcher administration and not reversed under Tony Blair (as explored in Chapters One and Two). If this is an accurate picture, relationships in the short term might be better, but the Civil Servants involved are likely to be neglecting some of the intrinsic tenets of their role. The Civil Service, institutionally, needs to find a more effective way of responding to new and varied pressures.

Inadequacy of training, preparation and induction for Ministers

Towards the end of each of my interviews, I asked Ministers for their suggestion**s** as to how understanding between Ministers and Civil Servants could be improved and relationships strengthened. The most frequent suggestion concerned improving training, preparation and induction for Ministers.

Lord Knight considered that Ministerial training was conspicuous by its absence, telling me that "It is a bizarre thing that Ministers are not really trained..."

Ben Bradshaw also felt that training was the most important thing that could help Ministers form better relationships with Civil Servants:

> "Oh yes, I think the most obvious thing for me is proper training for ministers, because ministers in our system, certainly in my experience, you're thrown in the deep end, you're called by the Prime Minister, one day you've got a job, you're in charge of an office. You know I've never run anything in my life, I've never been in charge of anything in my life, I'd never run a team of people before, I'd had no managerial experience, there's absolutely no induction or training or support at all - it's literally sink or swim… I saw perfectly good bright young ministers in the Labour

years come a cropper because they didn't have the experience, they made an easy mistake, which they needn't have done with a little bit of support and training."

His subsequent analysis as to why this might be the case reveals that there is some confusion as to who should own this responsibility. He thought that sometimes it may have been the Secretary of State in the department in question who did not consider that their junior Ministers required any training. Although he also thought that Civil Servants were unlikely to create or promote any training for Ministers because it was not for them to do so. Ben Bradshaw's strength of feeling on the issue hints at a serious omission that needs rectifying. He succeeded in spite of the circumstances, not because of them. Ministerial concerns about training are not a new phenomenon[38], and it is concerning that the problem appears to persist.

Pollitt & Bouckhaert (2004) corroborate the views of my interviewees from an academic perspective. They suggest that the missing public management reform narrative concerns Ministers. They question why civil servants are always perceived to be in need of reform, but Ministers are not. They advocate induction and training for ministers and suggest that "…the preparation of politicians for high office has…been a 'no-go' area for reformers for too long." (ibid, p. 157).

Baroness Cumberlege suggested that financing was the main barrier to training. Alun Michael, Baroness Liddell and Lord Bradley all suggested that Gerald Kaufman's book, *How to be a Minister* (Kaufman, 1997), could aid understanding. It is of concern that a book first published in 1980 is still relied upon by new Ministers. In essence it remains a description of

[38] For example, Douglas Hurd, reflecting on his appointment as Minister of State in the Home Office in 1983, invokes the same terminology as Ben Bradhsaw: "There were no days of handover from my predecessor and no training of any kind. The British system throws infant ministers into the pool and expects them to swim…At the age of fifty-three I found myself a clumsy apprentice who must nevertheless at all times maintain the appearance of mastery." (Hurd, 2003, p.320). Clive Ponting thought that Ministers were ineffective at managing their departments in the late 1980s because they "usually lack the experience and training as well as the inclination to enable them to do so effectively." (Ponting, 1989, p.16). And Ken Clarke recently stated that "When I was first appointed… there was no induction or anything…no one in Downing Street could tell me where the department was, let alone give me any other guidance as to what I was supposed to do." (Institute for Government, 2016).

Ministerial life in the 1970s. It does not fully account for the changes to the relationship that have occurred since the 1980s, as described in Chapter One.[39]

The importance of contact with the Opposition was also highlighted by several of my Ministers – including Lord Triesman, Lord Cope, Lord Blencathra and Lord Luce. A further issue to emerge was the lack of an integrated programme of induction for Ministers. Lord Bradley, for example, told me:

> "…I think there needs to be a little period of adjustment and a more integrated induction, civil service to ministers, ministers to civil service, to actually get that relationship going. Also to then install all the rules and regulations around what you can do and what you can't do, what you should do and what you shouldn't do and who's where doing what and why."

Lord Moore and Lord Triesman made similar comments. A related set of issues concerned the lack of time to learn and reflect in the job (Nick Raynsford, Lord Triesman). Another significant issue is the absence of ministerial handover. Nick Raynsford told me:

> "There's no attempt to evaluate performance… No one asked me to do an exit interview. No one tried to learn anything at all. I'd gone. That was it."

When Baroness Liddell left the Treasury she slipped a note for her successor under the blotter on her desk. It suggested that they meet for a discussion:

> "…it was [about] who I rated in the Department, who provided good work, what things were being worked up with enthusiasm by the Department, and what things they were trying to kick into the long grass."

Years later her successor told her that she had found the discussion the note prompted invaluable.

[39] Since conducting my interviews, former Minister Lord (John) Hutton, and former Permanent Secretary Sir Leigh Lewis, have published their own book on 'How to be a Minister'. It deals with many of the issues that have emerged since Kaufman's book was published – especially the rise of the Select Committee system and the role of Spads (Hutton & Lewis, 2014). I have cited the book in Chapter One (see footnotes) but as it was published after I conducted my review of ministerial literature (which helped inform my interview script) I have not considered it in depth in this piece. However, I consider it an extremely valuable addition to the very limited literature on this subject.

Conclusion

In Chapter One, I argued that a radical, formal constitutional change to the relationship between Civil Servants and Ministers is unlikely in the near future despite the wealth of informal change that has occurred in recent years. As a result of this contention, I focused much of my research on individual relationships. In Chapter Seven, my work comes full circle in examining systemic issues that underpin the actions of those in the executive. Most of the contents of this chapter are rooted in ministerial frustration at the structure and culture of Whitehall. I suspect this frustration has been exacerbated by Ministers' perceptions of increasing societal demands – reflected through the media and Parliament. The concern over feudalism suggests that a rather cynical, rational choice mindset may affect some parts of Whitehall. The tendency for the Civil Service to 'close ranks' on internal differences of opinion and not present them to Ministers appears long-standing. As Ministers increasingly demand plurality in policy advice, it is concerning that the Civil Service appears to lack the confidence to present Ministers with a spectrum of views – especially in person, during meetings.

In the assessment of many authors, the current system must be subject to more radical reform to cope. Tant (1993) argues for a more responsive and participatory approach to Government. Diamond (2014, Pp 281-285) argues that change should involve: (i) a clarification of Whitehall's role, in tandem with Governments that focus more on enabling (rather than directing); (ii) an overhaul of Ministerial-civil service relations, with officials' advice transparent, disclosable and to be defended by the officials directly; (iii) a general decentralisation and dispersal of central government power; and (iv) a royal commission on constitutional principles. Richards and Smith (2014) question whether generalised institutional crisis in the UK might be as a result of elitist and traditional 19th century concepts failing to deal adequately with 21st century demands for responsiveness and transparency. Whether a more participatory, open, and 'bottom up' system of Government is required is an important question to consider. However, as many of these authors acknowledge, the chances of a radical overhaul occurring soon, on their own view of the self-perpetuating nature of the Westminster model, is low. That reality has helped shape the approach in this thesis. I have argued that better understanding of Ministers' and Civil Servants' roles and the optimisation of individual relationships can make a positive difference to the quality of Government. But the findings in this Chapter show that there

are a number of systemic issues that will always limit the effect of the personal behaviours I have focused on. This is a reality of which I am fully cognisant and wholly accept.

Amongst the number of systemic issues that appear to have no prosaic solution, one emerges that I think does: the inadequacy of training, preparation and induction. During their time in office, many Ministers would not have felt able to admit that they were unprepared for the job. There should be a short, integrated induction programme – and it should be more detailed for those starting their first very ministerial jobs. In addition, there appears to be no proper evaluation of Ministerial performance or handover. Ministers felt that a lot of what they had learnt was instantly lost on the day of their departure. A simple mandatory handover between Ministers is likely to be hugely beneficial to the next incumbent. My interviewees perceived that small changes to the attitude of political parties, and the executive, to preparation, induction and training might have the potential to positively influence relationships and Ministerial performance.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

In this thesis I have explored the relationship between Ministers and officials. I argue that while the formal bounds of the relationship remain the same, the reality has changed quite significantly. Thatcher incentivised officials to re-imagine their roles if they wanted to progress. This created dissonance between the formal constitutional position and the reality. This dissonance has increased the pressure on individual relationships, alongside interlinked demands for greater accountability, the rise of special advisors, changing societal expectations and the broader impact of regular reform programmes.

Writing in the late 1980s and mid 1990s respectively, Ponting (1989) and Foster and Plowden (1996) considered the old model was broken and needed an immediate overhaul. More than twenty years on - formally - it prevails. The Coalition's rejection of the PASC's recommendation for a Royal Commission on the Civil Service (2013) shows that there is no appetite within the executive for a major constitutional reappraisal of the relationship. The contradictions and complexities inherent in the relationship that my work exposes suggest that a proper clarification of roles, accounting for the new realities, would be an extremely positive development. I add my voice to those who have called for an open review of the ministerial – civil service relationship to take place. It has been ninety-eight years since the last review of this kind (Haldane). But, as I have argued throughout, I consider the prospects of any such review occurring to be extremely low.

This assessment has driven my focus on optimising individual relationships within the existing paradigm. As a professional doctorate candidate, it is also important for me to make recommendations to improve practice – especially in relation to an area that can be opaque. I used my primary research to derive a number of perceived positive or negative influences on relationships. I have articulated these perceived influences in a form which I hope will be of professional value to actors in Government in the future, supported by extended quotations from named former Ministers. To my knowledge, these potential influences have not been distilled in this form before. My contention is that any improvement in relationships, as a result of the better understanding that this work promotes, has the potential to improve the efficacy of Government itself.

According to my interviewees, Ministers are most likely to positively influence relationships with their Civil Servants when they show leadership, set direction, understand the importance of the embryonic relationship, demonstrate energy and charisma, and show their officials respect. Ministers who show they are able, who are confident in challenging their officials, and who carry their Civil Servants when making purely political decisions may also enjoy better relationships. My interviewees thought that Ministers may negatively influence relationships when they lack external experience, do not work cohesively with ministerial colleagues, change their mind frequently, and do not think strategically. Ministers should avoid mediating relationships with Civil Servants through special advisors, or criticising their Civil Servants openly.

My ministerial interviewees found that Civil Servants could positively influence relationships when they demonstrated commitment, expertise, fearlessness, honesty and independence. Civil Servants who take the time to understand their Minister's philosophy and are dedicated to delivery once a final decision is made, even if they disagree with it, are likely to positively influence relationships with their Ministers. Those who lack competence, undermine policy and seek control, are change averse, and lack external experience are all likely to negatively influence relationships. Civil Servants who do not lead, refuse to take responsibility, and do not communicate clearly will diminish themselves in their Ministers' eyes.

Despite the institutional, cultural and constitutional restraints – it is still within the gift of individual Ministers and Civil Servants to learn from their predecessors' experiences. The former Ministers I spoke to were united in their desire for their own knowledge of relationships in government to be shared for this reason.

I identified themes in the ministerial literature concerning the behaviours of Civil Servants: a desire to seek control and resist change, and questions over competence. Their dominance in the literature was not corroborated by my interviewees. They thought that this disparity might exist because some of their ministerial counterparts were attempting to assuage blame for their personal failings and playing into the public's scepticism of bureaucracy. For my interviewees the narrative was mostly a construction; consciously on the part of other Ministers, and unconsciously on the part of the public. My work does not seek to dismiss the claims in the literature about the Civil Service's perceived weaknesses. My interviewees had numerous concerns – but these tended to manifest themselves

through systemic criticisms. Feudalism and its consequences were highlighted. Other concerns identified include hierarchical practices, unwillingness to expose Minsters to a spectrum of opinion, and potential politicisation. The culture of the service was also challenged, with some Ministers feeling that the wrong behaviours were incentivised, that recruitment strategy was wrong and that the wrong skills were valued. Training, induction and preparation for Ministers were seen as completely inadequate – I return to this below.

Haldane endorsed

A unifying point that emerged is the importance of both sides simply 'being themselves' and embodying traditional conceptions of their role. Both must appreciate that their success is dependent on the other, their strengths are generally different, and their roles are complementary. Ministers and Civil Servants may find each other challenging at times when exhibiting these behaviours. An improved understanding of respective roles may turn this into a positive scenario, rather than one that results in defensive attitudes being adopted. When the natural tension inherent is acknowledged, the energy, challenge and dynamism created may force each party to raise their game for the benefit of both.

There is a clear connection between the positive picture painted by my interviewees and a classic vision of Haldaneian duality. The contraction in deliberative space that I argue has occurred since the Thatcher years cannot be endorsed or dismissed by a small sample of ministerial interviewees. What is clear from my primary research is that many of the positive influences identified concerning Civil Servants chimed with their role as envisioned by Haldane (thinking, creating, critiquing and deliberating about policy, in tandem with their Minister, before taking action). The negative influences encompassed being divisive, defensive, parochial, selective as to what they tell their Minister, and resistant to change, without a rationale for their resistance. This list could be a description of a Civil Servant who has moved away from the core tenets of the role; embracing a binary approach and defining themselves apart from their Minister.

The Minsters I spoke to still value symbiosis, mutuality and duality. The values enshrined in Haldane are the ones that Ministers told me that they still valued in their colleagues, and in their Civil Servants. Haldane is implicitly endorsed as a positive model through the words of my interviewees. At a time when the deliberative space continues to contract, that

conclusion should sound a warning to all those who care about the quality of the governing relationship in the UK.

My 'insider researcher' role, critical reflections on practice, and potential dissemination

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that my own position as a Civil Servant could be seen as a potential strength and weakness of this work. Having worked in the Civil Service for over fourteen years, I have been subject to the culture, conventions and belief systems that I touch on above. It is inconceivable that these have not affected my approach to this work, or the manner in which I have weighed and judged the contributions to it. My agency as a researcher may have affected the responses my interviewees provided. My role could have affected my decision to focus on optimising relationships within the existing framework. I was aware from the outset that this piece could be construed as a defence of the civil service. I hope that the prominence of the Ministerial perspective throughout this work, and the concerns dealt with in Chapter Seven, answer this potential charge. Nor should this work be seen as a defence of the model in which Ministers and Civil Servants exist. One of my central contentions is that Haldane is being undermined; another is that former Ministers implicitly regard Haldane as a gold standard. That contradiction illustrates the tensions that the current framework has to try and bear. The direction of travel suggests this will only become more difficult as time passes.

My professional role also provides me with the opportunity to reflect critically on my own practice, and follow my own recommendations when interacting with Ministers. For example, I have paid more attention to trying to understand the philosophy of the Ministers I deal with, factoring this in to policy design from the outset. I have also placed further emphasis on presenting a broader range of internal opinion; even if not all of this reflects my personal view. As long as this is made clear to Ministers, and the policy 'owner' takes responsibility for the advice and their ultimate recommendation, this is likely to improve the quality of Ministerial decision making. My work has also developed my ability to 'reflect in action' (Costley et al., 2010 Pp 118-119). I hope to adopt a more deliberative and conscious approach when applying my knowledge to practice, and analysing the assumptions behind decisions taken by myself and colleagues that might otherwise be left unexamined.

In a broader sense, two factors are likely to decide whether my work can be judged as a 'success' in practical terms – i.e. will it help improve the mutual understanding of relationships between Ministers and officials?

The first is whether it reaches its intended audience. I have been in contact with Martin Stanley – one of the former officials I interviewed in related research, and creator of the civilservant.org.uk website, which attracts over a quarter of a million visitors annually. Martin has indicated he is happy to consider placing my findings on the site. I may submit extended versions of Chapters Four to Seven of this work. In my assessment, an established web-resource, which is not operating under the limitations of the Cabinet Office, is the best avenue to reach present and future Ministers and officials. I would also like to publish at least one academic article[40], expanding on Chapter Six and what we can draw from the disparity between the literature and my interviewees' views.

The second factor is whether my findings resonate. Whilst, as discussed, some of my findings appear to divert slightly from the ministerial literature, I hope that they capture a part of the relationship's essence. My professional insight leads me to consider that they do, and that Ministers and Civil Servants would recognise many of the nuances and dynamics that my thematic analysis exposes. The specific stories I have included, from former Ministers, mean that the work is less abstract than some other material may be. I also hope that the credibility of the work is enhanced by the agreement of my interviewees to be cited by name.

Recommendations for future areas of research

Ultimately my research has a practical bent, given my aim of improving understanding and trying to optimise relationships in government. However, the work has revealed a number of areas that might benefit from further academic research. I have focused on three specific issues.

The first concerns Haldane. There is a broader tension between relationships as envisioned by Haldane, and the demands for greater accountability, transparency and clarity of roles in government. The Haldane model appears to be an absolutist one: constitutionally and

[40] Potential journals which might be suitable include the British Journal of Politics and Internal Relations, British Politics, Public Administration, Parliamentary Affairs, and Public Policy and Administration.

publicly the Minister and the Civil Servant are inseparable. That model does not chime with the demands above. At the moment, the executive seems to be in a half-way house. More transactional relationships, the rising strength of parliament, the diminishing strength of the Civil Service, the rise of special advisors and the increasing plurality of advice are all factors pushing towards a less deliberative system. Yet my interviewees did not see Haldane as a mythological cloak hiding a mass of inconsistencies; they simply identified the behaviours Haldane promotes as positive ones. This raises further questions: can the executive go back to Haldane? Would this be an objectively good thing if it could? And if not, can a sensible way be found to balance Ministerial-Civil Service duality with the demands for accountability and transparency that have emerged? These are all questions that further research should address.

The second concerns the disparity that emerged between the views of my interviewees and the material in the ministerial literature. I have suggested various explanations for this, many of which drew on my interviewees' own opinions. At the conclusion of Chapter Six, I advance my own suggestion that the disparity may not be as stark as it at first appears. This is because my interviewees had a range of criticisms and concerns, but these tended to be more systemic and structural, rather than being focused on the behaviours of individual Civil Servants. Whilst I would like to expand on this in a journal article, there is also scope for a much more developed analysis. This could include interviews with former Ministers who have been critical in memoirs or diaries – which might yield more nuanced counter-opinions.

The third concerns the inadequacy of training and preparation for aspiring Ministers, and induction for new Ministers. There is a fundamental question here about the apparent gap and why it continues to exist. I suspect that various constraints are likely to have prevented training, preparation and induction from becoming embedded. These constraints may be financial (lack of party funds to divert to preparation), practical (lack of time) and cultural (insufficient attention given to the issue and confusion over who is responsible). The Cabinet Office is historically reluctant to produce material designed for Ministers. It may be that Ministers do not feel able to ask for help, or raise these concerns whilst in post, without undermining their own credibility. The Civil Service is rightly the focus of the debate when it comes to the relationship, but the Ministerial perspective can be overlooked. The emphasis my interviewees placed on training and support indicate the importance of getting this right. Further research could address this issue in some detail:

considering the previous efforts to provide ministerial training, successes and failures in doing so, investigating the approach of each party, considering whether the Civil Service should have any role, considering whether the role itself is an inhibiting factor in Ministers asking for help, and developing training and induction programmes in this light.

Recommendations for future practice

In addition to my core findings concerning the behaviours that Ministers and Civil Servants may wish to aspire to, I conclude by making the following recommendation for future practice. Whilst I suspect some are extremely unlikely to occur, others could be quickly and easily implemented.

1. **The Government should review and clarify the roles and responsibilities of Civil Servants and Ministers.** A fresh look should be taken at where the boundaries are drawn given the changes that have occurred in recent years. Lines of accountability should form part of this review.

2. **The Government/Civil Service should review the support provided to Junior Ministers.** Junior Ministers often feel marginalised; simultaneously overwhelmed by their workload but underwhelmed by their responsibilities. This is not just a question of Civil Service support – it poses a more fundamental question about how we conceive of the junior ministerial role.

3. **Each political party with a realistic prospect of forming (part of) a Government should invest in training aspirant Ministers in the run up to a General Election.** This need not be prohibitively expensive nor time consuming. Former Ministers from each party could be utilised. Former Civil Servants could also take part. Preparation could include case studies examining policy successes and failures. It could also encompass practical tips about how Departments work and how to work productively with Civil Servants.

4. **The Government should ensure that when a Minister is appointed, there is a short, mandatory handover with their predecessor. This should be followed by an integrated induction programme**. The handover could take the form of a short, informal meeting – not requiring a Civil Servant to be present. The integrated

induction should involve key Civil Servants, Special Advisors and ideally ministerial colleagues in the Department. A more comprehensive induction programme should be provided for those starting their first ministerial job.

5. **The Civil Service should review its approach to staff deployment, especially in roles with frequent contact with Ministers, or on policies which are Ministerial priorities.** My interviewees often considered that the needs of Ministers are not taken into account when Civil Servants are moved – especially those who Ministers have built good working relationships with. This is not a call for Ministerial appointments; rather for some flexibility and common sense to be exercised.

6. **The Civil Service should encourage Civil Servants to openly debate policy positions in front of Ministers.** This is systemically discouraged given the hierarchical nature of the Civil Service and the perceived need to provide Ministers with an established policy view. There are many occasions where an informed discussion of alternate options, between Civil Servants who have a different opinion, will help Ministers make better decisions.

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Appendices

APPENDIX I: TABLE OF MINISTERIAL LITERATURE REVIEWED

	Year first published	Form	Highest position achieved	Party	Years as a Minister	Tone of Civil Service refs
Benn, T.	1995	Diary	SoS	Lab	11	Negative
Blair, T.	2010	Memoir	PM	Lab	10	Mixed
Blunkett, D.	2006	Diary	SoS	Lab	9	Negative
Bruce-Gardyne, J.	1986	Memoir	MS	Con	2	Mixed
Callaghan, J.	1987	Memoir	PM	Lab	11	Mixed
Clark, A.	1993	Diary	MS	Con	9	Negative
Crossman, R.	1977	Diary	SoS	Lab	6	Negative
Healey, D.	1989	Memoir	SoS	Lab	11	Mixed
Heseltine, M.	2000	Memoir	SoS/DPM	Con	18	Mixed
Howe, G.	1994	Memoir	Chancellor	Con	15	Positive
Hurd, D.	2003	Memoir	SoS	Con	16	Positive
Jenkins, R.	1991	Memoir	SoS	Lab	8	Mixed
Kaufman, G.	1980	N/A	MS	Lab	5	Mixed
Lawson, N.	1992	Memoir	Chancellor	Con	10	Mixed
Major, J.	1999	Memoir	PM	Con	12	Mixed
Mandelson, P.	2010	Memoir	SoS	Lab	6	Mixed
Mullin, C.	2009	Diary	PuSS	Lab	4	Negative
Quin, J.	2010	N/A	MS	Lab	4	Mixed
Thatcher, M.	1993	Memoir	PM	Con	16	Negative
Williams, S.	2009	Memoir	SoS	Lab	9	Positive

Notes:

1. These can be split between a ‘diary’ and ‘memoir’, with the exception of Gerald Kaufman and Joyce Quin’s books (the former being a guide for Ministers, and the latter an examination of the constitution). Both offer ample insight into relationships with Civil Servants, hence their inclusion.

2. Acronyms - PM: Prime Minister; DPM: Deputy Prime Minister; SoS: Secretary of State; MS: Minister of State; and PuSS: Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.

3. I have attempted to give a general score to the 'tone' of the references to the Civil Service/Civil Servants. This is intrinsically difficult, and is only intended as a very rough indicator, which gives some additional context to my textual analysis in Chapter Two. "Mixed" means that there was a reasonable balance of positive and negative comments concerning the Civil Service/Civil Servants, or that there was not a clear balance indicating the author's "overall" view. All the diaries I considered I labelled as "negative", and only one of the memoirs – which may indicate that the distinction between the two is of particular importance.

APPENDIX II: TABLE OF FORMER MINISTERS INTERVIEWED

	Name	Party	Highest position	Relevant election snapshot	Position immediately after that election	Total years as Minister
1	Lord Knight	Lab	MS	2005	PuSS (Environment)	5
2	Paul Goggins	Lab	MS	2005	PuSS (Home Office)	7
3	Lord Jenkin	Con	SoS	1983	SoS (Environment)	12
4	Sir Malcolm Rifkind	Con	SoS	1983	MS (FCO)	18
5	Ben Bradshaw MP	Lab	SoS	2001	PuSS (FCO)	9
6	Lord Browne	Lab	SoS	2001	Chief Sec (HMT)	9
7	Nick Raynsford	Lab	MS	1997	PuSS (Environment)	8
8	Alun Michael	Lab	SoS	1997	MS (Home Office)	7
9	Lord Waldegrave	Con	SoS	1983	PuSS (Environment)	16
10	Lord Whitty	Lab	PuSS	2001	PuSS (Environment)	4
11	Fiona Mactaggart MP	Lab	PuSS	2005	PuSS (Home Office)	3
12	Baroness Liddell	Lab	SoS	1997	Economic Sec. (HMT)	6
13	John Healey MP	Lab	MS	2005	Fin. Sec (HMT)	9
14	Lord Glenarthur	Con	MS	1983	PuSS (Health)	6
15	Lord Moore	Con	SoS	1983	Fin. Sec (HMT)	10
16	John Denham	Lab	SoS	2001	MS (Home Office)	9
17	Lord Cope	Con	MS	1992	Paymaster General	13
18	Lord Blencathra	Con	MS	1992	MS (Environment)	10
19	Lord Triesman	Lab	PuSS	2005	PuSS (FCO)	5
20	Lord Bradley	Lab	MS	2001	MS (Home Office)	5
21	Baroness Armstrong	Lab	CW	1997	MS (Environment)	10
22	Lord Howe	Con	SoS	1983	SoS (FCO)	15
23	Lord Luce	Con	MS	1983	MS (FCO)	11
24	Lord Skelmersdale	Con	PuSS	1987	PuSS (Health)	4
25	Baroness Cumberlege	Con	PuSS	1992	PuSS (Health)	5

Notes on the table

1. The interviews are organised by number in the original order that I conducted them. Lord Knight was the first former Minister I interviewed (on 24 August 2012) and Baroness Cumberlege was the last (on 9 November 2012).

2. Additional acronyms/abbreviations used (following Appendix I) are:
    - CW: Chief Whip.
    - Chief Sec: Chief Secretary to the Treasury
    - Economic Sec: Economic Secretary to the Treasury
    - Fin. Sec: Financial Secretary to the Treasury
    - Paymaster Gen: Paymaster General (Treasury)

3. The relevant election snapshot indicates the election where the Minister identified *first* appeared on the list I generated (e.g. 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2001 or 2005). The following column indicates their position at that point in time, whereas the previous column indicates the highest Ministerial position they achieved throughout their career.

4. The total years served as a Minister represent an estimate – compiled principally from the parliamentary website. It may not be an entirely accurate figure because former posts are recorded on the site by whole year only. The totals also span Ministerial office held outside of the period 1983-2010 (e.g. some Conservatives also served in Edward Heath's Government).

5. Paul Goggins, who I interviewed on 4 September 2012, died on 7 January 2014 aged sixty. I extend my sincere condolences to his family. Paul had approved the transcript of my interview prior to his passing, and Dominic Goggins approved the use of Paul's quotes in the project. I would like to thank Dominic for his interest in my work and his enthusiastic support at such a difficult time.

6. Lord Howe, who I interviewed on 5 November 2012, died on 9 October 2015, aged eighty-eight. I extend my sincere condolences to his family. Whilst I had been in correspondence with Lord Howe, he had not confirmed I could cite him by name prior to the submission of this thesis.

APPENDIX III: TABLE SHOWING APPROVAL OF NAMED CITATIONS

	Name	Date cleared	App for pub.	App thesis only	Status/ notes or corrections to be actioned
1	Lord Knight	15/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
2	Paul Goggins	02/02/15	YES	N/A	Cleared by Dominic Goggins
3	Lord Jenkin	13/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
4	Sir Malcolm Rifkind	17/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
5	Ben Bradshaw MP	17/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
6	Lord Browne	03/02/15	YES	N/A	No corrections
7	Nick Raynsford	26/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
8	Alun Michael	22/11/14	YES	N/A	Corrections made
9	Lord Waldegrave	14/11/14	YES	N/A	Corrections made
10	Lord Whitty	29/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
11	Fiona Mactaggart MP	14/11/14	YES	N/A	Corrections made
12	Baroness Liddell	15/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
13	John Healey MP	02/02/15	YES	N/A	No corrections
14	Lord Glenarthur	19/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
15	Lord Moore	03/02/15	YES	N/A	No corrections (over phone)
16	John Denham	02/02/15	YES	N/A	Corrections made
17	Lord Cope	12/11/14	TBC	YES	Corrections made
18	Lord Blencathra	18/11/14	YES	N/A	Corrections made
19	Lord Triesman	02/02/15	YES	N/A	No corrections
20	Lord Bradley	01/12/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
21	Baroness Armstrong	24/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
22	Lord Howe[41]	N/A	N/A	N/A	Unable to confirm
23	Lord Luce	12/11/14	YES	N/A	No corrections
24	Lord Skelmersdale	15/11/14	YES	N/A	Corrections made
25	Baroness Cumberlege	24/11/14	YES	N/A	Corrections made

[41] With the exception of Lord Howe (see Appendix II), I had approval to use the quotes, cited by name, from all my other ministerial interviewees. In seeking this approval I sent each interviewee a list of the quotations I wanted to use, a copy of the original transcript of the interview (which in nearly all cases they had previously approved), and a copy of the latest version of my thesis at that time. The list of quotations provided had cross references to page numbers in the latest version of the thesis, so that each interviewee could easily look up the context for each citation.